

TURKEY AT A CROSSROADS: WHAT DO THE GEZI PARK PROTESTS MEAN FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE REGION?

HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA, AND EMERGING THREATS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 2013

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA, AND EMERGING THREATS,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2 o'clock p.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Dana Rohrabacher (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I call to order this hearing of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats. Today's topic is "Turkey at the Crossroads." What do these protests mean for democracy in the region and what does it mean for Turkey?

After I and the ranking member Keating each take 5 minutes to make opening statements. Each member present will have 1 minute for opening remarks, alternating between majority and minority members. And, without objection, all members will have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous material for the record subject to length and limitation rules. Hearing no objection, so ordered.

Turkey is a NATO ally whose strategic and geographic location is as important as ever. And I remember during the Cold War when Turkey was absolutely essential to the security of the United States and, yes, the peace of the world.

Over the past decade, the orientation of Turkish foreign policy under Prime Minister Erdogan has been troubling. Its shift in alignment away from our friends in the Middle East and toward Syria and Iran has increased tensions in the region. The policy, called "No Troubles With Neighbors," has been applied to the new engagements with Syria and Iran, but the opposite has taken place with Israel.

Erdogan embraces Hamas leadership, for example, for its seizure of power in Gaza and the Iranian leadership for its "right to a nuclear program." He has supported the infamous Gaza flotilla that tried to rum supplies to the Hamas terrorists. The Syrian civil war has caused Prime Minister Erdogan to move backwards toward the West and face the menace of an Iranian Hezbollah intervention.

As requested, the U.S. and NATO have deployed Patriot air defense systems in Turkey. So all of this is having its impact. The

Turks are Sunni Muslims and have a natural sympathy for the Sunni rebels in Syria who are fighting a dictatorship rooted in a minority cult associated with Shia Islam. Yet, sympathy has not kept Erdogan's policy of supported the rebels and accepting refugees from being controversial at home at least.

If the Obama administration is serious about increasing U.S. aid to the rebels, it will have to work with Turkey, as it has been doing. But who exactly are the Turks supporting in this? What type of people are we talking about? Are the people that are being helped by Turkey in the Syrian conflict people who—do they hate the United States? And how reliable a partner do we have now in Turkey if they are indeed allying themselves with these anti-American elements?

Mass protests over local issues have shaken the Erdogan administration. And its resort to a harsh crackdown on dissidents helps spread popular anger. And let us note that up until now, we have seen and I have personally seen Turkey as an example of what I would say moderate Islam in a changing world. And some of the crackdown that we have seen and, of course, this situation in Syria and some of these other alliances leaves some serious questions, which is the reason why we are having this hearing today.

Of course, cracking down on demonstrators leads to worse situations, as we have found out in the West. And Prime Minister Erdogan's loyalists have, of course, unfortunately—this is not true of the Prime Minister himself, I am sure—resorted to wild conspiracy theories, blaming the Jewish lobby and the American Enterprise Institute for the demonstrations taking place in their own country. The Prime Minister himself has referred to the interest rates lobby, which is or at least can be easily translated as a slur against Jews. Such tactics call into question the character of the ruling party of Turkey. And when I say "call into question," it doesn't answer it, but it calls into questions. And that is why we are having this hearing today, to explore some of those questions and find out, maybe calm some of the fears or perhaps maybe re-confirm from some of the other fears that we have had.

There have been reports that anti-semitic textbooks have been adopted in public schools in the last 10 years and that Hitler's "Mein Kampf" has become some kind of a best seller. This is not a sign of a healthy democracy. And yesterday it was reported that in the capital of Ankara, police raised some 30 residential addresses to arrest protestors at home, going well beyond just confronting demonstrators in the streets in order to maintain public order.

The European Union has postponed talks on Turkey's request for membership until at least October because of the concerns. And, most strongly, these concerns are being voiced by Germany. And they will, of course, when these talks resume, at that point, the situation could have calmed down in Turkey. And we would be able to find out the true nature of what is happening.

Our hearing will look at whether Turkey can meet the challenges that face it at home and abroad and are what challenges are being faced by the Erdogan Government itself and what are the potential impacts on these challenges in the way they are met on the interests and values of the people of the United States.

To help us answer these questions, we have a distinguished panel, including a veteran diplomat, experts on Turkish society and history and on Islam, and a journalist who has been covering the protests on the ground. What we do not have is anyone from the State Department. And we requested that State send someone. But their response was that the Department wanted to “keep its public powder dry.” So maybe they are trying to assess the situation as well. And so what the Obama administration thinks of events and how it will react will remain a mystery, perhaps to them as well as us.

And let me just close by saying this. This hearing is not intended to be a “beat up Turkey” hearing. We actually have some very serious questions and concerns about what is going on, the direction of the country. As I say, in the not-so-distant past, I looked at Turkey as perhaps a great example of modern Islamic Government and how it could do good things and can be relied on to promote progress and peace and stability.

Now, after the events and what has been going on, what are some of the things that have been disclosed, where there are serious questions. And today I hope to have those questions answered.

And now I would turn to our ranking member for whatever opening statement you would like to make for as long as you would like to make it.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding these hearings today.

Turkey has been a U.S. ally in an incredibly rough neighborhood for many decades now. For this reason, the political stability and economic strength of Turkey is a matter of importance to many American policymakers, analysts, and business people. The membership of Turkey in the Group of 20 along with its growing trade partnerships throughout the region are positive developments, not only for Turkey but also for U.S. national interests.

Further, the recent news of enhanced prospects for normalization of relationships between Israel and Turkey as well as the long overdue peace accord with the Kurds is welcomed. However, it is domestic politics that have now taken center stage in Turkey. The electoral dominance of Prime Minister Erdogan’s AK Party for more than a decade has led to the emergence of a seemingly one-party state. Other parties have little-to-no ability to influence decision-making, and that has left many Turks feeling threatened, frustrated, and powerless. These feelings are exacerbated by the Prime Minister’s self-acknowledged majoritarian philosophy, namely that a government elected with a parliamentary majority has no post-election obligation to consult the governed.

However what most caught the eye of this subcommittee and the world has been the Prime Minister’s seeming sanctioning of brute force by the police against peaceful protesters. In the last few weeks, five people have died. Some 4,900-plus protesters have been detained and 4,000 people were injured.

There are countless reports of arrests of doctors treating injured bystanders, young adults using social media to express their frustrations, and lawyers attempting to defend the fragile rule of law. Further, the rhetoric of the Turkish Government has inflamed the situation, as the Prime Minister publicly praises the police and re-

peatedly distinguishes between those that support him and those who do not.

For this reason, I am pleased that President Obama, Vice President Biden, and Secretary Kerry have made responsible statements calling the Turkish Government to account, and I commend them for that. I will speak for myself when I say that following years of mostly astute governance in Turkey, the Turkish Government's response to the recent protests came not only as a disappointment but as a surprise, frankly.

As we sit here today, the protests continue on, with the Turkish Interior Ministry reporting at least 2.5 million protesters over the past 3-plus weeks. In fact, these numbers and the sheer diversity of the protesters represent hope for the emergence of a vibrant, politically engaged generation of Turks that embrace pluralism. If so, the energy of these demonstrations could well become the basis for a re-invigorated, dynamic democracy. That is not a development Mr. Erdogan should fear but, rather, he should welcome.

I look forward to hearing our witnesses' perspectives on this developing situation and thank especially those who have traveled from Turkey to share their views here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I yield back my time.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much. And Mr. Duncan has an opening statement as well.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And, as a friend of Turkey, I appreciate you holding these hearings on what the protests mean for democracy in the region.

I remember just 2 short years ago, you and I were in Turkey observing the parliamentary elections in June 2011 if my memory serves me correctly. So watching the political dynamics going on in Turkey right now is something that is interesting to me. And I enjoyed a conversation I had this morning about these very issues. And I look forward to a follow-up on that.

And, with that, I will yield back.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much for that opening statement. And let us just note that 2 years ago, there was that election. We were there. And everyone was deeply impressed that Turkey was having an honest and open and free election and how people were engaged and involved. And that was a very impressive sight for those of us who knew what turmoil was going on in the rest of the area. And now, of course, today we have a different vision of what is happening in Turkey. So that is why we need to discuss it.

We have five very knowledgeable witnesses with us today that can help us in this discussion. James Jeffrey served as U.S. Ambassador to Turkey from 2008 to 2010. Prior to that appointment, he had served as deputy chief of mission from 2004 to 2005 in Iraq. And he returned and served as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's special adviser in Iraq. And so what we have with Mr. Jeffrey is a very—you know, how do you say?—very experienced man. And, also, I seem to remember that you were in Iraq when I got kicked out of Iraq that last time. I will let that sit.

We also have Dr. Hillel Fradkin.

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Chairman, if I may add, I was with you on that trip. And we were kicked out of Iraq, too, Ambassador.

Mr. KEATING. Mr. Chairman, may I say I was not with you? [Laughter.]

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right. Dr. Hillel Fradkin, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and directs its Center on Islam, Democracy and the Future of the Muslim World. He cofounded and co-edits the Journal on current trends in Islamic Etiology, the leading journal devoted to the study of contemporary Islam. And we appreciate him being with us today.

We have with us Kadir Ustun. He is the research director of the SETA Foundation here in Washington and assistant editor of Insight Turkey, the foundation's academic journal. Mr. Ustun holds a Ph.D. in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies from Columbia University, where he was also taught at that university.

Kadri Gursel is a contributing writer for Al-Monitor's Turkey Pulse and has written a column for the Turkish Daily Milliyet. And he has done that since 2007. He focuses primarily on Turkish foreign policy, the Kurdish question, and Turkey's evolving political Islam. He has joined the Milliyet Publishing Group in 1997 after working as a correspondent.

And since 1995, he was kidnapped by the Kurdish PKK insurgents. And I am sure that that is a tale he has recounted in a book. We should all maybe take a look at that. It sounds like an exciting adventure in your life, perhaps one that you don't think back on quite fondly. And the name of his book is, "Those of the Mountains."

We also have with us Soner—and I am going to see if I can pronounce this. Could you help me with that?

Mr. CAGAPTAY. Cagaptay.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Cagaptay. And he is the Beyer family fellow and director of Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He earned his Ph.D. in history from Yale University and has taught courses on the Middle East at Yale, Princeton, Georgetown, and Smith College. And he has also served as chair of the Turkey Advanced Area Studies Program for the State Department's Foreign Service Institute.

Thank you all for being with us. Did I miss somebody? Okay. And you will be our first witness. Thank you, Bill, for getting me straight on that. So we will start there. And then each of you would be given a 5-minutes to present some testimony. We would appreciate if you would keep it around 5 minutes. And then we will follow up by questions. And I would appreciate, as I say, appreciate keeping it to about 5 minutes.

If you have more extensive remarks in that, they will be placed into the record at this point in the hearing. Thank you very much. And you may proceed.

STATEMENT OF SONER CAGAPTAY, PH.D., BEYER FAMILY FELLOW, DIRECTOR, TURKISH RESEARCH PROGRAM, THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

Mr. CAGAPTAY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for giving me the opportunity to testify today on the recent protests in Turkey, what they mean for democracy in Turkey, the country's neighborhood, and for U.S. policy. The following is a

summary of my prepared remarks, which I will submit for the written record.

Turkey, as you said, is an important country. It is a NATO member state. It is a key ally for the United States. Situated between Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Mediterranean, Europe, and the Middle East, it is vital to U.S. interests across those regions. Take for instance, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Turkey is the only country that borders these three nations and is vital for U.S. policy toward these countries. That is why I think it is important for us to look at the recent domestic developments in Turkey because, according to some analysts, the recent protests that have rocked Istanbul and other cities for almost a month represent what is probably the biggest challenge that the governing Justice and Development Party in Ankara has faced since it came to government in 2002. So what do these protests mean for Turkey's stability, for democracy in Turkey, for Turkey's region and the Middle East, and obviously for U.S. policy?

I will start with Turkey's dramatic transformation under the AKP. Since this party came to power in 2002, Turkey has become, thanks to AKP's sound economic policies, a wealthy country with a majority middle class society. This is a first in Turkish history.

As a result of this transformation, Turkey has joined the prestigious members of G-20 club of nations. And it has also become a powerhouse in the Middle East. As a result of this dramatic transformation, the country, as I said earlier, has become a majority middle class society. And, ironically I think, the protests show that the AKP is perhaps a victim of its own success.

The middle class that the party's policies have created is now committed to individual freedoms and is taking issue with the governing party's style of governance and its attempts at political domination.

This suggests that the often-cited modernization theory that as countries develop and become more prosperous, they become better democracies, is being validated in Turkey. We are seeing the rise of a middle class that demands respect for individual freedoms, freedoms of expression, assembly, media, and association, as well as minority and individual rights. I think, in a nutshell, this is what encapsulates the developments in Turkey.

Allow me now to look at, Mr. Chairman, what I think the developments do not constitute. I don't think the developments constitute yet another episode of the Arab Spring. Turkey did not experience the proverbial winter, political winter. The country was and is a democracy. So the Arab Spring analogy does not quite apply.

Nor do the protests suggest a significant weakening of the AKP. By most measures, about half of the country's population still supports the governing party. The protests are also not about a manifestation of the secularist Islamist divide that has for so long dominated Turkish politics. Although most of the protestors are secular, their demands are not about secularism, per se. They are about the quality of democracy and demand for liberal values.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that these demonstrations present a new dynamic in Turkish politics. The members of the protest movement, roughly representing one half of the Turkish electorate, have

found strength in numbers. They have also found out that they can continue and sustain their demonstrations, thanks to the organizing force of social media technologies. These are indeed new. This is indeed a new dynamic in Turkish politics in the sense that the protests represent Turkey's first massive, grassroots political movement that is likely to sustain itself.

This new form of political force in Turkish politics could obviously complicate Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's political agenda. Among those issues I would like to cite is Turkey's Syria policy, which you have looked at, Mr. Chairman. Although most Turks do not support Bashar al-Assad, many are also unnerved by Ankara's policy, which they think has exposed Turkey to increased risks and costs.

Take, for instance, a recent attack, a error attack, unfortunate attack, on the Turkish town of Reyhanli that killed 51 people that took place in May. This is the worst attack Turkey has suffered in modern history. Accordingly, I think this persistent opposition is likely to move Ankara to a position of leading from behind in Syria.

Turkey's relationship with the U.S., I don't think, will suffer much from the unrest. Ankara values its relationship with Washington. And I think that the rapport Prime Minister Erdogan shares with President Obama is going to help resolve any wrinkles that will arise from Washington's criticism of Ankara's conduct. Still the issue remains. Turkey is divided deeply between the supporters and opponents of the governing party. And the recent protests may have deepened this chasm further.

Secular, middle class, liberal Turks are demanding respect for freedom of the press, expression, association, and assembly as well as a voice on environmental policy and urban space. I think the Turkish leadership should take comfort in the fact that the demonstrations are not directly against AKP. Rather, they are for individual rights and better democracy.

The leadership should also avoid giving credit to widespread conspiracy theories that the demonstrations are driven by "outside forces." Millions of people have demonstrated in over 78 Turkish cities over the course of the month. This is clearly an indigenous Turkish movement, and the country's government would be better served to listen to it, embracing democracy. In this regard, I think Brazil is a case in point.

Mr. Chairman, I think at this point, at this juncture, the way forward for Turkey overlaps with U.S. policy and U.S. interests in the Middle East. Turkey has become an economic power in the region. It has become a soft power nation. And it wants to be a leader in the Middle East. And Ankara wants Washington to treat it as such. I would say that as far as U.S. policymakers are concerned, Turkey can become a leader in the Middle East only if it shines as an example of liberal democracy.

To this end, the Turkish Government and people would be well-served to embrace broad individual liberties, including freedoms of assembly, association, media, and expression. At the moment, Turkey is attempting to draft its first civilian-made constitution. And this presents Ankara and all the Turks with a unique opportunity to do so, recognize those liberties, and doing so without restrictions.

What is good for Turkey is also good for the Middle East and the United States, Mr. Chairman. Turkey can overcome its political tensions by adopting a constitution that respects individual freedoms and recognizes its diversity. This would also mark an important milestone for the country's desire to become a source of inspiration for other Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East. Only if Turkey seizes the opportunity, it can become a partner Washington can be proud to have in the region.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the take-away of today's conversation and our message to our ally, Turkey, the country's citizens, and its neighbors should be the following. Democracy is not just about the right to be equal. It is also about protecting the right to be different.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Cagaptay follows:]

Statement of Soner Cagaptay, Ph.D.

**Beyer Family Fellow, Director, Turkish Research Program
Washington Institute for Near East Policy**

**Testimony Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats:
“Turkey at a Crossroads: What do the Gezi Park Protests Mean for Democracy in the
Region”**

Wednesday, June 26, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for giving me the opportunity to testify on the recent protests in Turkey and their implications for democracy in Turkey and its neighborhood. The following is a summary of my prepared remarks.

Turkey, a NATO member state, is an important country for the United States. Situated between the Caucasus, the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Europe, Turkey is vital to U.S. interests across these regions. Take for instance, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Turkey is the only country that borders these three nations, and is vital for U.S. policy towards these countries.

According to some analysts, the recent protests that rocked Istanbul and other Turkish cities pose the greatest challenge the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has faced in over a decade in power. What do the protests mean for stability and democracy in Turkey, and for democracy in the Middle East?

Since coming to power in 2002, the AKP has implemented sound economic policies, which have grown Turkey's economy and facilitated its membership in the Group of 20. And unlike many other emerging market growth stories, Turkish growth has actually reduced economic inequality and transformed the country into a majority middle-class society for the first time in its history. Yet, the recent protests show that the AKP has, perhaps, become a victim of its own success.

The middle class which has grown as a result of the party's economic policies is committed to individual freedoms -- and it is now challenging the AKP's style of governance and its attempts at political domination.

All this suggests that modernization theory -- the idea that economic development leads to more democracy -- is being validated in Turkey. As countries become middle class, they tend to become irreversibly diverse, developing the bedrock for democratic governance, including consensual politics and respect for individual and minority rights.

The developments in Turkey do not constitute an episode of the “Arab Spring.” Turkey did not experience a proverbial political winter. The country is and remains a democracy.

Nor do the protests suggest a significant weakening of the AKP. By most measures, about 50 percent of Turks continue to support the party. Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has organized a number of rallies to bring his own supporters into the streets as a counterweight to the Gezi protests. These pro-government demonstrations have produced a turnout comparable to the anti-government marches across Istanbul.

Nor are the demonstrations yet another manifestation of the secularist-Islamist cleavage that has defined many of Turkey's political battles in recent years. Although most of the protestors are secular, their rallies are not about secularism per se, but rather about the quality of Turkish democracy and a demand for liberal values.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that these demonstrations present a new dynamic in Turkish politics. Members of the protest movement, roughly representing one half of the country that does not support the governing AKP, have discovered that they have strength in numbers. They have also found out that they can sustain their demonstrations, largely thanks to social media technologies. Indeed, the protests represent Turkey's first massive, grassroots political movement. In the past, grassroots movements never reached a massive scale. Conversely, while Turkey has witnessed several large anti-government protests, such as the rallies of 2007, these demonstrations were organized in a top-down fashion and were linked to the military.

This new form of grassroots and liberal opposition politics could complicate Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's political agenda. Should he, for instance, decide to proceed with transforming the country's parliamentary democracy into a presidential system, he may face a highly effective backlash. Meanwhile, Turkish President Abdullah Gul has already positioned himself as a nonpartisan figure, supporting the protestors' right to assemble and stating that "democracy is not just winning elections."

The new opposition is also likely to shape Turkey's Syria policy. Although most Turks do not support Bashar al-Assad, they are unnerved by Ankara's policy toward the regime, which they believe has exposed Turkey to increased risks and costs. On May 11, 2013 the Turkish border town of Reyhanli suffered a devastating terror attack which claimed the lives of 51 people. This attack followed months of periodic cross-border shelling from Syria and worries about terrorist infiltration into Turkey's urban centers. Accordingly, facing a new and persistent opposition on the streets, Ankara will move toward a more measured position of leading from behind in Syria.

In contrast, Turkey's relationship with the United States is unlikely to suffer much from the unrest. Ankara values its relationship with Washington and the strong rapport that Prime Minister Erdogan shares with President Obama will help resolve any wrinkles that arise from U.S. criticism of Ankara's conduct.

Still, the issue remains, Mr. Chairman, Turkey is divided almost evenly between supporters and opponents of the governing AKP. Recent protests may have deepened this chasm further.

The secular, middle class and liberal voters are demanding respect for freedom of the press, expression, association, and assembly, as well as a voice on environmental policy and urban space. In this regard, the Turkish leadership should take comfort in the fact that, notwithstanding

marginal violent groups that have penetrated some of the protests, *the demonstrations are not directly against the AKP, but rather for individual rights and better democracy*. The Turkish leadership should also avoid giving credit to widespread conspiracy theories which allege that the demonstrations are driven by “outside forces”. Over a million Turks have demonstrated in over 78 Turkish cities over the course of the past month. This is clearly an indigenous Turkish movement, and the country’s government would be better served to listen to it, embracing democracy. In this regard, Brazil is a case in point.

Mr. Chairman, Turkey’s way forward at this juncture overlaps with U.S. interests in the Middle East. Having become an economic motor and soft power nation in the region, Turkey sees itself as a Middle East leader. And Ankara wants Washington to treat it as such. As far as U.S. policymakers are concerned, *Turkey can become a leader in the Middle East only if it shines as an example of liberal democracy*.

To this end, the Turkish government and people would do well to embrace broad individual liberties, including freedoms of assembly, association, media, and expression. At the moment, Turkey is attempting to draft its first civilian-made constitution. This presents Ankara with a unique opportunity to recognize these liberties, and do so without restrictions.

It would be in the interests of all Turks if the new constitution also addressed Turkey’s political fault lines, providing for constitutionally-mandated gender equality, as well as freedom of religion *and* freedom from religion, so that religious, conservative, secular and liberal Turks alike can feel welcome in the new Turkey.

Commitment to liberal democracy would also provide Turkey with much needed stability.

Turkey grows because it attracts investment, and international investors are drawn to the Istanbul *Borsa* (stock market) because Turkey is seen as a rare island of stability surrounded by unstable countries. Ankara cannot afford to lose this critical advantage.

What is good for Turkey is also good for the Middle East and for the United States. Turkey can overcome its political tensions by adopting a constitution that respects individual freedoms and recognizes its diversity. This would also mark an important milestone on the path to becoming a source of inspiration for other countries in the Middle East. If Turkey seizes this opportunity, it can become the partner Washington can be proud to have in the region.

Mr. Chairman, the takeaway of today’s conversation, and our message to our ally Turkey, to the country’s citizens and its neighbors should be the following: *democracy is not just about the right to be equal; it is also about protecting the right to be different*.

Mr. ROHRBACHER. Well, thank you very much for that very thoughtful testimony.

And I would like to now turn to Ambassador Jeffrey for some thoughts from him. The last witness was fairly optimistic for the long run. And we are very interested in your views on this.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JAMES F. JEFFREY, PHILIP SOLONDZ DISTINGUISHED VISITING FELLOW, THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY (FORMER AMERICAN AMBASSADOR TO TURKEY)

Ambassador JEFFREY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Keating. It is a pleasure to be here today. I will submit my longer statement for the record and just summarize a certain number of points.

First of all, my colleague at the Washington Institute, Soner Cagaptay, has laid out, I think, a very accurate and optimistic but, again, realistic view of how we should go forward and how Turkey will probably go forward. I will just touch on a few domestic issues that I would like to highlight and then get to what the U.S. should do and some of the implications for the region.

First of all, I do think that this does demonstrate that there is a large fissure in Turkish society between two relatively large groups. And this is being fought out on various levels. But that is okay because that is how democratic countries evolve. And we have seen this in East Asia. We have seen this in central and Southern America. Many of you have gone on visits to these countries as they are moving forward. And they do this step by step. This is what is happening in Turkey.

The concern that we all have with the reaction of the government is, first of all, as came out in a statement from the White House just yesterday after President Obama called Prime Minister Erdogan, is the concern about the violence of the reaction of the authorities against the demonstrators and the concern about freedom of expression, freedom of demonstration, and freedom of media. All of these have been called into question to one or another degree by some of the statements and actions by the government. And that is of concern. But, in particular, the polarization of those people who are opposed to the government is troubling.

From our standpoint, looking from the outside, first of all, Mr. Chairman, this is not going to lead to the overthrow or the fall of the Erdogan Government, certainly not before the elections of 2015. And I think the government is still maintaining probably a majority. But what it does portend is trouble for a country that is integrated ever more into the advanced world with its trade, with its diplomatic and military relationships and NATO with the European Union and so forth, and a country that needs good relations with the outside, be it tourism, be it again its trade.

Some of that has already suffered because of the demonstrations. There are other aspects of that, including the recent decisions by the Federal Reserve, but the stock market did fall dramatically. The lira has also fallen against the dollar. And there is some indication that tourism in foreign direct investment may be challenged.

But, more importantly, the majority can rule in Turkey, like in any other country. It can issue orders to the police. It can pass

laws. But it cannot control the minority. And in the end, there has to be some kind of relationship between those people who are not part of the governing coalition and the governing coalition to have stability in any country. We dealt with this in our own constitutional process in the Eighteenth Century between those in favor of a majority rule and those in favor of minority rights. Turkey is going to have to go through this.

It is a democracy. For the moment, I think we can trust in the Turkish people to work their way through this. But meanwhile what should we do? And what is the attitude of the U.S. Government?

Obviously, coming from a diplomatic background, I like to do diplomatic talks private, rather than in public, but there is a role for public discourse as well, both from the government and from institutions like the Congress, speaking out about our values when we see them being challenged. But, nonetheless, where the United States can help the most because we do have a good relationship with the Erdogan Government is in private conversations. And that is apparently exactly what President Obama did yesterday in his conversation: Coach the Turks on our view of why continued clashes in Turkey are not good for Turkey's future, are not good for Turkey's economy, and are not good for Turkey's role in the region.

And that is the thing I want to leave with, Mr. Chairman. This region is in a worse condition than I have seen it in many decades for many reasons, including some decisions we perhaps made. But at the end of the day, if we are going to find a way forward with Syria, with Iraq, and with Iran, as my colleague and as you people have pointed out, we are going to have to use our good relations with Turkey. We are going to have to cooperate and coordinate fully with Turkey. And that requires some kind of relationship with this government. That means that we have to be cautious in what we say publicly. We can be more open privately. And we will be more effective.

I think that is the way the administration is going, but I hope it continues on this, not ignoring the problems but putting them in the context of an extremely dangerous and big agenda that we have in the region right now, sir.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Jeffrey follows:]

TESTIMONY: TURKEY AT A CROSSROADS: WHAT DO THE GEZI PARK
PROTESTS MEAN FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE REGION, JUNE 26TH, 2013

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SUBCOMMITTEE
ON EUROPE, EURASIA, AND EMERGING THREATS

Ambassador James F. Jeffrey, Philip Solondz Distinguished Visiting Fellow,
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

The demonstrations that broke out in Gezi Park and Taksim Square in Istanbul in late May represent the biggest challenge to PM Erdogan's AK Party rule in the 11 years the party has been in power. That said, the demonstrations do not indicate a serious erosion of support for the Prime Minister and his Party, although his popularity has dropped somewhat in recent polls. Thus it is highly unlikely that the demonstrations will lead to the toppling of the AK government, or early elections, now scheduled for 2015.

But what the demonstrations, and the government's reaction to them, do show is that Turkey is increasingly split into two quite different political groupings, and that the government might be contributing to further polarization of the society. This is the situation of greatest concern to those of us who have worked with and follow Turkey closely. Any government has the right to restore order, and at least some of the demonstrators came from violent, radical backgrounds, while blocking a major traffic center in one of the world's biggest cities for weeks is not something that any government will allow to go on indefinitely.

But what has troubled both observers, including me, and the US government, is the at times seemingly indiscriminate force used against peaceful demonstrators, including those in the park as well as those blocking Taksim Square. Perhaps even more troubling is the attitude of some, but not all, of the government leaders. These leaders, including the Prime Minister, have generally demonized all of the demonstrators, despite the PM's meeting with a delegation of them, and adopting a reasonable position on resolving the park question.

But the language used against the demonstrators, and both the police as well as legal actions directed against them, call into question the government's commitment to free speech and assembly, to the principle of proportionality, and, at bottom, to the democratic principle that minorities cannot simply be ignored.

When ignored, they are likely to challenge not just the government, ultimately in elections, but quite possibly the very foundations of the state, creating instability and potentially chaos. Concern about this has led to a 20% drop in the stock market, as well as the value of the Turkish Lira, along with indications of a drop in

tourism and FDI. Turkey will recover from these immediate effects, but the long-term effects of a deep fissure in society on the country's stability, and thus ability to maintain a high-tech, 'First World' economy driven by exports, could be very negative.

But as long as Turkey is a democracy, we have to have faith in both the Turkish people and its leadership that Turkey can work its way through this apparent dichotomy between majority power and minority rights, and reestablish its enviable stability, upon which its equally enviable economic growth is based. Specifically, Turkey faces not only parliamentary elections in 2015, but potentially much more important votes in 2014—for a new President, and in a referendum for a constitution to replace the 1980s one approved under military rule. PM Erdogan has long hoped to use the 2014 ballots to become President of a different, far more Presidential democracy. His position on the fissures within his society, and the effect of those fissures on Turkey's development, will likely have a key impact on these votes.

WHAT SHOULD THE US DO

The US has spoken out repeatedly, but has been restrained in its reaction. That is a good decision on the part of the US, although not everyone will agree with it. While we have to speak out, and in the case of Turkey have spoken out, to defend our values and concept of democracy and freedom, we also have to consider the context.

First, Turkey, again, is a democracy, and the people have the right to pass judgment on all that has been said and done related to the demonstrations. It is wise to await that judgment. Second, publicly condemning Turkey and PM Erdogan would be strongly counter-productive. It will not push the Turkish government to tailor its response. Turkey has long lived with strong American criticism of one or another aspect of its domestic policies.

Moreover, the US does not have a strong standing within the Turkish population. According to the Pew Survey, despite massive US public diplomacy efforts, educational programs, and close policy coordination, favorable attitudes towards the US in Turkey have dropped from roughly 23-30% through most of the 2002-5 period to between 9-17% in the past six years; this is, with limited competition from Pakistan, the lowest favorability rating in any significant country around the globe.

If we make the demonstrations about us, about the outsiders, or otherwise follow the tact that many in Europe seem to be adopting, we will undercut the chance for voices and opinions favoring compromise and reconciliation to gain ground. Obviously, were Turkey to take a serious turn away from participatory democracy, this approach would not work, but we have seen no such turn.

Third, we have only limited leverage with Turkey; no development aid to speak of, trade is relatively small in comparative terms, and our massive defense sales are at least as much in our interest as in Turkey's.

Finally, and in my mind most importantly, we need good relations with Turkey to deal with the dangers that beset the region. We have not seen the region in so much turmoil and insecurity in decades. Regional stability, the survival of regimes, the security of the oil trade, and even the overall structure of US-led international security are at risk. We need to coordinate closely with Turkey on all three of the most pressing problems—the Syrian civil war, the threat of division in Iraq, and the Iranian nuclear file. The last thing the US needs, in the midst of this, is a major row with one of our few key allies sufficiently strong and stable to actually assist us.

Having said that, it is important that the US, as a friend, counsel the Turkish government, behind closed doors, without threat, but forcefully, about the long-term effects of continued government policies and attitudes of the sort we have seen. Aside from the erosion of democratic values such policies and attitudes encourage, Turkey's international image, for political competency and as an example of Middle Eastern democracy, as well as at least some aspects of its economic success, and the social stability that reinforces both its image and economy, will all be placed at risk.

This is bad for Turkey, bad for the United States, and bad for regional stability.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much.
And I think we would go to Mr. Ustun now.

**STATEMENT OF KADIR USTUN, PH.D., RESEARCH DIRECTOR,
FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL RE-
SEARCH (SETA)**

Mr. USTUN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for inviting me to speak at this hearing. I have already submitted my testimony. And I will only highlight some of the points discussed there in detail.

Today, what we see in Turkey is the growing pains of democracy. The crux of the issue is somewhat paradoxical. We have the most successful and reformist political party in power for more than a decade. However, there are certain segments of the society who are frustrated with some policies but cannot express their discontent through the regular channels of formal politics because of the absence of a viable opposition.

The basic dynamics of the protests are fundamentally different from the Arab revolutions where there was no meaningful representation of the popular will. The challenge will be for Turkey to accommodate the legitimate demands and aspirations of many Turkish youths. If it succeeds, Turkish democracy will be even stronger in the years ahead and serve as a democratic inspiration for the broader region.

The protests can be likened to Occupy Wall Street movement, rather than the Arab revolutions. The disproportionate use of force by the police against a small group of protestors occupying the Gezi Park quickly snowballed into much larger protests. Protests are much more similar to those in the West and in the U.S.

Three major groups have participated in these protests. The biggest one has been the middle and upper class urbanites angry about the Gezi Park redevelopment project and certain policies. These policies resulted in the divisive controversies similar to those over stem cell research, abortion, and gun control in the U.S. and Europe.

The second most significant group is the young CHP supporters and the ultranationalist wing of the party. Young people are increasingly disenchanted by the political system as they see no hope of challenging the dominant ruling party in the absence of a strong leadership. The CHP is split on how to approach the government's initiative to resolve the Kurdish question. Discontent created by the lack of representation and the Kurdish settlement process as well as the Syria policy is a major motivator for this group of demonstrators.

The last group is the marginal leftist groups, some of which are illegal organizations implicated in various terrorist attacks, including the bombing attack on the U.S. Embassy in Ankara in February. The government tried to make a distinction among these three groups. We can discuss how successful that was. And it promised to listen to the legitimate demands of the protestors about the Gezi Park. But the Prime Minister's harshest words were directed against the third group, which engaged in violence and vandalism.

The Prime Minister met the protestors in person, at a long, 4-hour, meeting and announced that the government would respect the current court injunction blocking the project. If the court decides to remove the injunction, the government will hold a referendum. However, the protestors announced that they would continue to occupy the park and hold demonstrations, resulting in further police action.

As its efforts to reach out and provide an apology to peaceful protestors proved insufficient, the government viewed the continuation of protests as ill-intentioned. The government argues that the marginal groups and CHP members are orchestrating a campaign to undermine the democratically elected government by taking to the streets, hence the government's repeated references to the ballot box as the ultimate jury. It doesn't refer to a majoritarian understanding of democracy but, rather, a past where extrapolitical powers could wield influence over the elected governments.

The protests have resulted in a lively debate throughout the political spectrum about basic rights and freedoms and what an advanced democracy should look like. Turkey's takeoff over the past decade created a new generation of young people, who are much more educated, economically comfortable, and increasingly globalized. Their aspirations, frustrations, and discontent cannot fully be expressed in the political scene through the existing opposition parties. The AK Party will need to engage this segment of the protestors.

The same goes for the CHP. The struggle between the hard-line ultranationalists and the moderates is pulling the party apart. The CHP will have to transform itself into a center-left party or it will find itself fighting the wars of a bygone era. The U.S.-Turkey relationship is important, not only for bilateral relations, but also for stability and peace in the broader Middle East. Turkey has a critical relevance for the U.S. foreign policy issues, including withdrawal from Afghanistan, stability in Iraq, resolving the Iranian nuclear issue, and ending the Syrian conflict, as well as achieving peace between Israel and Palestine.

Turkey has proven time and again it is a dynamic democracy with a vibrant civil society, despite its flaws and imperfections. The debate today is not on whether to have democracy but on how to create a better one that embraces all segments of the society. That is testament to the country's commitment to democratic ideals and the rule of law.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ustun follows:]

Turkey at a Crossroads: What do the Gezi Park Protests Mean for Democracy in the Region?

Statement for the Record

Kadir Ustun, Ph.D.
Research Director
SETA Foundation at Washington DC

June 26, 2013

House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you very much for inviting me to speak at this hearing on the implications of Turkey's Gezi Park protests for democracy in the region.

Today, what we see in Turkey is the "growing pains" of democracy. The crux of the issue is somewhat paradoxical. We have the most successful and reformist political party in power for more than a decade. However, there are certain segments of the society who are frustrated with some policies but cannot express their discontent through the regular channels of formal politics due to the absence of a viable opposition. The challenge will be to accommodate the legitimate demands and aspirations of many Turkish youths. If it succeeds, Turkish democracy will be even stronger in the years ahead. Turkey's ability to serve as a democratic inspiration for the broader region will strengthen in the future.

The AK Party Decade

The AK Party came to power under very difficult conditions, as the Turkish economy was in shambles in the wake of the 2001 economic crisis. Kurdistan Workers' Party's (PKK) leader Öcalan's capture in 1999 led to a relatively calm period until 2004 but there was no resolution of the Kurdish question in sight. There was political disarray among political parties as a result of ineffective coalition governments under the military's domination of the political scene. The human rights situation and democratic metrics were dismal, noted by many governmental and non-governmental reports published in the US and the EU.

The AK Party defined itself as a conservative democratic party similar to Christian Democrats in Europe. The government set out to reenergize the country's EU bid, which resulted in Turkey's formal candidacy 50 years after its first application to be part of the Union. EU funds flowed into the country and the negotiation process resulted in structural changes with implications for the civil-military balance, economic stability, education and social reforms among others. Many taboo subjects from the Kurdish question to minority rights started to be discussed openly. Lifting of marshal law in eastern part of Turkey and virtual elimination of torture are only some of the improvements on the human rights front.

Economic achievements have made Turkey the 16th largest economy and a G20 member. The Turkish economy's growth rates have been second only to China on average over the past 10 years. Turkey has increased its business ties with most of its trading partners through visa liberalization and easy export policies. Turkey recently paid off its debt to the IMF, which had bailed out Turkey in the aftermath of the 2001 crisis. The current account deficit remains a challenge but the country continues to make substantial investments in its economy, while trying to take advantage of its young yet steadily aging population.

Political and economic achievements were accompanied by an increasingly pro-active, self-confident, and engagement-oriented foreign policy. Turkish foreign policy had traditionally viewed its neighbors with suspicion, trying to undermine Turkey's unity by manipulating the PKK. Instead of "turning its back," the AK Party sought to engage all its neighbors, including Greece and more recently Armenia with varying degrees of success. Turkey's high-level engagement with Syria was put to good use in Turkey's previous efforts to broker a peace deal between Israel and Syria. However, the Cast Lead operation by Israel on Gaza resulted in Turkey's reaction and condemnation. Whenever Turkey interpreted Israel's actions as heavy-handed and destabilizing for the regional peace and security, it condemned them under various governments prior to and including under the AK Party rule.

Political relations between Turkey and Israel gradually deteriorated. When Hamas won the elections in 2005 in Palestine, it was not allowed to participate in formal politics. The Turkish government saw this as unfair treatment of a democratically elected political movement. Turkey's souring relations with Israel culminated in the infamous flotilla (*Mavi Marmara*) incident, where the Israeli commandoes intercepted and raided an international aid flotilla destined for Gaza, resulting in the deaths of 8 Turkish and 1 Turkish-American citizens. Israel refused to deliver Turkey's demand for an apology but President Obama's recent efforts produced an Israeli apology. One of the significant consequences of the weakening of Turkish-Israeli relations is that the US-Turkey relations are much less dependent on the course of Turkish-Israeli relations. Today, both Turkey and the US compartmentalize their relations with Israel.

2010 was a critical year in US-Turkey relations because of the flotilla incident and Turkey's "no" vote on Iran sanctions at the UN Security Council. Turkey, along with Brazil, had just brokered the Tehran Declaration with President Obama's previous encouragement but the US argued that the deal was flawed. Both the flotilla incident and the Iran sanctions vote were damaging to the US-Turkey relations. However, there was an important change in 2011 when Turkey's decision to host the radar as part of NATO's missile defense system convinced many that Turkey's western vocation was solid. Moreover, Turkey's clear stance on the side of the Arab populations rising against authoritarian rulers since early 2012 was critical in its broadly positive reception in the Arab world. Turkey was perceived as a democratic Muslim-majority country with a strong economy, democratic institutions, and soft power. The US policymakers came to value Turkey's positive role in the regional earthquake that was dubbed the "Arab Spring."

Challenges Ahead for Turkish Democracy

Political and economic achievements under the AK Party resulted in a much better democracy overall, especially when compared to the 1990s. There are, however, challenges Turkey needs to tackle especially if it wants to become a regional player.

Turkey has an ambitious goal to become one of the top ten economies of the world by 2023, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Turkish Republic. Turkey's aspiration to become a regional player is closely tied to its economic rise similar to other emerging nations such as the BRIC countries. The Turkish economy has a lot of experience and quality standards due to its long-standing trade ties with Europe. It is a sufficiently diverse economy highly dependent (Turkey imports around 75 percent of its energy) on foreign oil and gas resources. Sustaining economic growth, reducing energy dependency, weathering the global economic crisis, and managing its current account deficit are some of the economic challenges Turkey faces.

On the political front, the most pressing issue is the resolution of the Kurdish question. The government is engaged in a "settlement process" to end the more than 30 years of conflict with the PKK, which has claimed more than 40,000 lives. The "settlement process" is the continuation of the 2009 "democratic opening" when the Turkish government set out to tackle the Kurdish question. Following a series of reforms allowing the expression and use of the Kurdish language, the government convinced the military establishment that the problem could not be resolved through military means only. This is a policy endorsed by the US administration.

The Turkish government adopted a two-pronged approach: it would continue to respond to the PKK militarily but it would also negotiate with the parliamentarians of the Kurdish political party. In early 2013, Prime Minister Erdoğan announced that the "relevant branches" of the government (Turkish intelligence) were conducting talks with the imprisoned leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan. In his Kurdish new year's message (Newroz), Öcalan declared the end of the armed struggle and the beginning of the political struggle only.

Once the PKK militants withdraw from Turkey, the government will move to address Kurdish demands (dubbed "normalization"). The government initiated the so-called "People of Wisdom" initiative (group of intellectuals, journalists, and activists have been visiting all cities in Turkey) to reach out to the public and listen to their perspectives on the resolution of the Kurdish question. The reports produced at the end of this public diplomacy campaign will help guide government actions on the issue. So far, the "settlement process" has gone relatively smoothly despite provocations, such as the assassination of a high-level PKK leader in Europe, to halt it. If the government is able to end the conflict, this will have a tremendous impact on Turkey's democratization and regional stabilization.

However, the current anti-democratic laws, such as the Anti-Terror Law, constitute a true impediment to the enlargement of political and personal freedoms. For example, "praising" a terrorist organization has been a crime under the Anti-Terror Law. With the

recent passage of the 4th reform package recently, praising or propagating for terrorist organizations will no longer be considered a crime unless it constitutes an imminent threat or incites violence.

The AK Party government has worked to increase religious rights and freedoms for the minorities at unprecedented levels. Through several “openings,” the AK Party government has sought to engage religious minorities such as Christians and sectarian minorities such as Alevi citizens. Religious minority issues have traditionally been couched in a narrowly nationalistic discourse, which meant that religious minorities were seen as outside the national identity and at times even as agents of outside influences.

By adopting a language of rights and freedoms for everyone, including religious people in general, the AK Party government has sought to support the inclusion of religious minorities by the broader society. The return of previously confiscated property and the reopening of various churches for worship (such as the opening of the restored Akhtamar Church in Van) are among some of the policies the government pursued to reach out to Turkey’s religious minorities. It will be crucially important for the government to continue such efforts and accommodate the demands of these groups for the sake of religious pluralism and democratic consolidation.

Alevi in Turkey have historically been a disadvantaged group largely due to misunderstandings and ignorance about their culture. As members of a sect within Islam, Alevi differ from other sects not on the basis of theology but mostly in cultural terms. The government has made gestures to the Alevi community (for example, the Prime Minister’s apology for the Dersim massacre in 1937 and 1938) but it will need to engage them more consistently and directly to incorporate their legitimate demands in the new system. Currently, the most pressing issue for the Alevi community is the status of their houses of gathering (*Cemevis*) and recognition of their cultural identity. Alevi leaders regularly express frustration with the People’s Republican Party’s (CHP) unwillingness to address removal of articles from the constitution that ban dervish lodges and shrines.

The need for a fully civilian constitution has been the most agreed upon item in Turkish politics over the past several decades. However, successive efforts have failed and governments had to settle for minor amendments. The most consequential changes to the constitution happened with the constitutional referendum of 2010, which abolished articles that protected coup stagers. The changes paved the way for the prosecution of military personnel involved in coups to be tried in civilian courts instead of military courts only. The referendum (passed by 58 percent favorable and 42 percent unfavorable votes) also entailed reform of the judiciary (civilian involvement in high court appointments through the parliament), afforded economic and social rights (collective bargaining rights for government employees), and strengthened individual freedoms (the establishment of the ombudsman). Forging a truly civilian constitution will be critical to consolidation of democracy in Turkey.

The ensuing plethora of court cases against military personnel suspected of coup plotting received a lot of international attention due to long trial proceedings among other

problems. In fact, the prime minister himself complained about the shortage of high-level military personnel due to ongoing trials. The long trials and outdated judicial processes meant delays in the speedy delivery of justice. Turkey has introduced several judicial reform bills but there is still much to improve in the judicial system.

The current government is also trying to reenergize its EU bid, which remains crucial for democratic consolidation. Yesterday's news on opening a new chapter on regional cooperation is welcome news. Many EU chapters remain closed due to Europe's economic problems and "cold feet" about Turkey's membership. However, various Turkish ministries continue to implement structural adjustments to be ready when the chapters are opened in the future. Both the President Gül and the government officials repeatedly call on European leaders to revitalize Turkey's accession talks, as they continue to see it as a strategic goal despite the increasingly diminishing public support for membership.

Gezi Park Protests

Gezi Park protests can be likened to "Occupy Wall Street" movement rather than the Arab revolutions. The disproportionate use of force by the police against a small group of protestors occupying the Gezi Park quickly snowballed into much larger protests against the government. Mostly young groups frustrated with some government policies joined in the protests. Protests are much more akin to those in Spain, Greece, Britain, France, and the US.

Three major groups have participated in the protests. The biggest group has been composed of middle and upper middle class urbanites angry not only about Gezi Park redevelopment project but also about certain policies adopted by the government, such as the regulations on the sale of alcohol (similar regulations exist in the US and Europe). Some of these policies resulted in divisive controversies similar to those over stem-cell research, abortion, and gun control debate in the US and Europe.

The second most significant group has been from among young CHP supporters and the ultranationalist wing of the party. The youths are increasingly disenchanted by the political system, as they see no hope of challenging the dominant ruling party in the absence of a strong leadership. CHP is split on how to approach the government's initiative to resolve the Kurdish question. Discontent created by the lack of representation and the Kurdish "settlement process" is a major motivator for this group of demonstrators.

The last group is composed of some marginal leftist groups, some of which are illegal organizations implicated in various terrorist attacks (DHKP-C members were indicted to have attacked the US embassy in Ankara). The government tried to make a distinction between these three groups, promising to listen to the legitimate demands about Gezi Park. The prime minister's harshest words were directed against the third group, which engaged in violence and vandalism (rocks, knives, Molotov cocktails, fireworks, and guns were used by some protestors), but the distinction and the nuance was lost in translation.

Having met the protestors in person in a 4.5 hour long meeting, the Prime Minister announced that the government would respect the current court injunction blocking the redevelopment project. If the court decided to remove the injunction, the government promised that it would hold a plebiscite. Protestors, in return, announced that they would continue to occupy the park and hold demonstrations, which resulted in further police action to clear the park and Taksim Square. The prime minister's rhetoric has sharpened after the protestors' refusal to end the protests.

The government perceives the continuation of protests, despite its efforts to reach out to them and a government apology to the peaceful protestors, as ill intentioned. Thus, the AK Party decided to hold rallies around the country under the theme, "Respect for the Democratic Will," reportedly attracting more than a million AK Party supporters in Istanbul alone. The government argues that the marginal groups and CHP members are orchestrating a campaign to undermine the democratically elected government by taking to the streets, hence the government's repeated references to the "ballot box" as the ultimate jury. High attendance at nationwide AK Party meetings demonstrate that the government may emerge out of this episode with an even stronger victory in the local elections scheduled for March 2014.

The Gezi Park protests have resulted in a lively debate throughout the political spectrum about basic rights and freedoms as well as what an advanced democracy should look like. The basic dynamics of the protests are fundamentally different from the Arab revolutions where there was no meaningful representation of the popular will. Political representation is actually very high in the current makeup of the Turkish parliament (96 percent of the votes are represented) but the absence of a viable opposition frustrates disenchanted youths.

Turkey's takeoff over the past decade created a new generation of youths, who are much more educated, economically comfortable, and increasingly globalized. They have only known AK Party governments in their adult lives. Whatever aspirations, frustrations, and discontent they may have cannot adequately be expressed in the political scene through the opposition parties. One of the biggest challenges for the AK Party is to engage this segment of the protestors.

The same goes for the CHP, which is in fact at a crossroads. The struggle between the hardline ultranationalists and the moderates is pulling the party apart. CHP will have to transform itself to a center-left party and reach out to these youths or it will find itself fighting the wars of a bygone era. The ultranationalist wing is currently the strongest faction within the party and it regularly employs an anti-Western and anti-imperialist rhetoric. It continues to oppose any changes to the "unchangeable articles" of the 1980 constitution. The party also criticized the stationing of the NATO radar in Turkey and parliamentarians paid several visits to Syrian President Assad. The party backtracked on its initial support for the "settlement process" in resolving the Kurdish question. Such a posture prevents the main opposition party from breaking from its ultranationalist wing and incorporating young people who are disillusioned with the old politics.

Future of US-Turkey Relations

Turkey's relations with the United States over the last decade witnessed wild swings and shifts. Turkey's past decade under the AK Party coincided with the US invasion of Iraq, the financial meltdown in the US (which transformed into a global economic crisis) as well as a relative decline of US stature in the world. This period also overlapped with dramatic changes in the Middle East, as the ousting of longstanding authoritarian leaders led to the emergence of a generation of new leaders across the Arab world. Today, a new Turkey as a regional power is faced with a new US effort to reconsider its role in the region and around the globe.

The US-Turkey relationship is probably in the best shape it has been in recent memory. President Obama's first overseas visit was to Turkey and it was welcome news to the Turkish public and policymakers. President Obama called the US-Turkey relationship a "model partnership," signaling a new US approach to Turkey. Obama's first term witnessed serious challenges, threatening to damage this vision. However, the special personal rapport between President Obama and the Prime Minister Erdoğan helped American and Turkish policymakers overcome and respect their differences.

When the revolutions and turmoil were unleashed throughout the Middle East in early 2011, Turkey emerged once again as a stabilizing force. When the revolution spread to Syria, Turkey was confronted with the most serious challenge of the Arab Spring. Turkey spearheaded efforts to convince the Assad regime to accommodate the people's demands to avoid the violent quagmire we have witnessed ever since. Turkey's efforts proved insufficient as the Syrian regime saw it as an existential fight for its own survival. The most recent decision of the "Friends of Syria" to provide the opposition with arms is welcome yet insufficient progress from the Turkish perspective. Turkey will continue to ask the international community to help the Syrian opposition and address the humanitarian situation.

The sectarian tensions are increasing in the region as a result of the Syrian conflict. Turkey is one of the few powers that can pursue a non-sectarian policy although it is increasingly seen as a Sunni power despite its deeply entrenched secular politics. As we have seen in the recent spread of violence to Lebanon, sectarian violence continues to threaten regional stability and may define the next decade, especially if the Syrian conflict continues to burn. The US and Turkey have a common interest in reducing the sectarian implications and spillover effects of the conflict, which has already drawn Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Iran into a proxy war.

Turkey's "settlement process" has the potential to contribute to regional stability, as PKK activities along the borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria threatened security over the past decades. Kurdish political movement seems to have given up any secessionist demands, which will push Turkey to deepen its relations with Kurds throughout the region, as it has with the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq.

The current negotiations between the US and Europe on a transatlantic free trade agreement have the potential to further deepen US-Turkey ties. Turkey has been a

signatory to the Customs Union agreement with the EU without first achieving membership status. It has benefited from the agreement in increasing its competitiveness but the European businesses have been the main beneficiaries. If the US and Turkey can embark on free trade agreement talks, this will further improve relations between the two countries and strengthen the transatlantic alliance.

The US and Turkey have strong common interests. Their cooperation is important not only for bilateral relations but also for stability and peace in the broader Middle East. Turkey has critical relevance for the US foreign policy goals, including withdrawal from Afghanistan, stability in Iraq, resolving the Iranian nuclear issue, ending the Syrian conflict, and achieving peace between Israel and Palestine among others.

Turkey has proven time and again that it is a dynamic democracy with a vibrant civil society despite its flaws and imperfections. The debate today in Turkey is not on whether or not to have democracy but on how to create a better democracy that embraces all segments of the society. This in itself is a testimony to the country's commitment to democratic ideals and the rule of law.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, thank you for that very thoughtful testimony.

And, Mr. Fradkin, please?

STATEMENT OF HILLEL FRADKIN, PH.D., DIRECTOR, CENTER ON ISLAM, DEMOCRACY AND THE FUTURE OF THE MUSLIM WORLD, HUDSON INSTITUTE

Mr. FRADKIN. Chairman Rohrabacher, Ranking Member Keating, honorable members, let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity to testify today. The topic, "Turkey at a Crossroads: What Do the Gezi Park Protests Mean for Democracy in the Region?" is a most important one. And I am, therefore, very honored to have been invited to offer a response to this and the related questions cited in the invitation.

The latter largely focus on the meaning of these events for the prospects of Turkish democracy itself. And all of these questions are indeed related because it has been hoped that the fact of Turkish democracy and its successful operation would serve as a model for democratic development in other parts of the Middle East region. This has been especially true since the advent of the so-called Arab Spring and the overthrow of authoritarian regimes. It has also been especially true since the rise to rule of Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and his AKP party for the latter, as I think both the chairman and the ranking member indicated, appear to offer a model for the successful navigation of the tensions between democracy and Islam.

I have submitted more extensive and formal remarks, but what follows is a summary.

So what does Gezi Park mean? Alas, from the perspective of both Turkish democracy and broader regional hopes, the events surrounding Gezi Park are discouraging. This is because Gezi Park has brought to a head a crisis in the course of Turkish democracy. This crisis has been brewing for some time and has entailed a variety of particular issues and disputes. But the crisis is broader and deeper because it is about democracy as such, what it is and what it should be.

Gezi Park reveals that Turkey has not resolved this dispute for itself, at least not yet. And, for that reason, it is hardly in a position to serve as a model for others. Still less is this the case since the position of Prime Minister Erdogan, his party, and his government concerning the meaning of democracy, at least as enunciated recently, is a defective one, both from the point of view of Turkey and other states in the region.

This has become clear in the aftermath of Gezi Park through both the words and actions of Prime Minister Erdogan, his colleagues, and supporters. In brief, he has insisted on what one may call—and I think the chairman already did call—a majoritarian understanding of democracy.

Erdogan claims no more than a majority of 51 percent, a figure derived from the last elections. Still, he claims that this gives him the right to do as he pleases. For him, this is true for the additional reason that he claims to have made a great success of Turkey over the past decade and, therefore, knows what is best for Turkey now and in the future. All the more should he be free to

do as he thinks best, but what about the large number of the Turkish public who apparently did not vote for him nor support him? Since Gezi Park, Erdogan has given a very large number of speeches, which provide his understanding of them. They are, according to him, terrorists and traitors in league with foreign enemies. “Their malevolent intent is to hold Turkey down and back”—these are direct quotes—from the still greater Turkish future Erdogan intends to build. He has promised in meaning tones to uncover these alleged plots and punish all of those responsible, employing the full powers of the state. If that violates the strict rule of law, so be it.

And I want to stress the rhetoric of Prime Minister Erdogan has been really ferocious. Gezi Park was from the beginning an instance of this view. Much has been made of the force and violence used to suppress the original small band of tree-loving demonstrators. And this is important. It was what prompted many more people to come to Taksim Square, which led to still more force and violence.

But it is also important to note that the original demonstrators were attempting to block what was, in fact, an illegal act. The question of Gezi Park was actually in litigation. And a Turkish court had issued a stay on all work there. Still, Erdogan went ahead.

In part, the Gezi Park protests were in objection to this kind of high-handed and lawless behavior, which has become all too frequent in recent years. But Erdogan is, in part, right. The protestors also object to his vision of the Turkish future. And they think they should at least have a say in the matter. This is hardly surprising for it appears that what Erdogan has in mind is a kind of re-founding of the Turkish republic.

He is very attached to the year 2023, when it will celebrate its 100th anniversary, a re-founding which entails, somehow or other, a revival of its pre-republican past, morally, religiously and politically. This pre-republican past—it is obviously Ottoman past—was not notably democrat but, rather, was based on the will of the rulers. Thus, to many I think people in Turkey, Erdogan’s behavior and vision appear to be all of peace.

Let me turn to the questions external to domestic, Turkey’s domestic, politics, the regional questions, and end with that. Concerning the region, it is easy to see that the implications are not promising. The region and especially the Arab countries have an altogether too rich and deep experience of the politics of will, of an authoritarian will.

What it needs, what it has needed, what it still needs is some model of consensual democratic politics with some due accommodation of religious sensibilities. For a while, it seemed and was hoped that Turkey could provide that, but that is hardly the case today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, members of the committee.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Fradkin follows:]

**US House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
Hearing: Turkey at a Crossroads: What do the Gezi Park Protests
Mean for Democracy in the Region?
June 26, 2013**

**Testimony of Dr. Hillel Fradkin,
Senior Fellow and Director, Center on Islam, Democracy and the
Future of the Muslim World
Hudson Institute**

Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen. Let me begin by thanking you for the invitation to speak to you today. The topic – Turkey at a Crossroads: What do the Gezi Park Protests Mean for Democracy in the Region? – is a most important and urgent one. I am, therefore, most honored to have been invited to offer a response to this and the related questions cited in the invitation. The latter largely focus on the meaning of these events for the prospects of Turkish democracy itself. These questions are indeed related because it has been hoped that the fact of Turkish democracy and its successful operation would serve as a model for democratic development in other parts of the Middle East region. This has been especially true since the advent of the so-called Arab Spring and the overthrow of authoritarian regimes. It has also been especially true since the rise to rule of Turkish Prime Minister and his AKP party which appeared to offer a model for the successful navigation of the tensions between democracy and Islam.

So what does Gezi Park mean? Alas from the perspective of both Turkish democracy and broader regional hopes the events surrounding Gezi Park are discouraging - especially the behavior of the Turkish government. Prime Minister Erdogan has insisted that he is acting democratically and enunciated what he means by that. It means according to him the rule of the will of the majority as represented by him – no matter how great or small that majority may be. Erdogan himself repeatedly refers to his own majority as that of 51% of the public – having in mind the support he gained in

the last election. Perhaps remarkably, he seems to have little concern that nearly as many people do not support him or his party as do. Having majority support and a still greater majority of the legislative seats – through the peculiarities of the Turkish election system – Erdogan insists that his will must be done. Indeed he often complains that the structure of the Turkish government thwarts his will and has proposed changes to the constitution which would remove checks to the highest authority. Moreover, he has verbally attacked his opponents in very strong, contemptuous, menacing and even slanderous terms. They are he says terrorists in league with foreign conspirators who are thereby committing treason. Their aim is to bring Turkey down – a Turkey which has been a glorious success under his rule. This Erdogan declares he will not permit and he promises to use the full force of the state to uncover and punish the traitorous conspirators and terrorists.

It must be said that Erdogan's definition of democracy does cover a certain kind. But it is certainly not that kind of democracy known as liberal democracy. At least some of his opponents are seeking that kind of democracy and object to his efforts to stifle it.

How did this situation come to pass and what was the role of Gezi Park? Let me observe that Erdogan's mode of rule has changed over time. At the beginning and for quite some years, Erdogan enjoyed beyond his substantial base constituency a quite diverse group of supporters – including people who eventually went to Gezi Park and Taksim Square to protest. Such people appreciated his ostensible efforts to remedy undemocratic features of previous governments – including the heavy role of the military.

But it now appears that this kind of political alliance was merely tactical rather than the articulation of a common democratic vision in which the whole Turkish public could share in some important degree. In April of this year, the matter was put rather clearly and bluntly by Aziz Babuscu, the chairman of the Istanbul AKP party organization. He said, "Those with whom we were stakeholders throughout the past 10 years will not be our

stakeholders in the coming decade. ... Let us say the liberals, in one way or another, were stakeholders in this process, but the future is a process of construction. This construction era will not be as they [liberals] wish. Hence, they [liberals] will no longer be with us. ... The Turkey that we will construct, the future that we will bring about, is not going to be a future that they will be able to accept."

In this context what do the Gezi Park protests mean? Simply put, that the non-AKP stakeholders have gotten Babuscu's message and that they object. It is likely that they will continue to object even though it is unclear what vehicle they might find to express their opposition. At all events, Erdogan has managed to turn Turkish democracy and politics more and more into a simple contest of wills, a contest he means to win, by force if necessary. That too proved to be involved in Babuscu's message. Indeed it was Erdogan's original use of force to evict the very small number of original Gezi Park protestors that produced the explosion in Taksim square and ultimately in many other public squares around Turkey.

It might seem that Gezi Park as such and the issue it most immediately entailed – the preservation of its trees – was incidental to the larger struggle going on within Turkish politics and society and served merely to strike the match to a fuse. In part this is correct. After all it was preceded by discontent with other actions taken by Erdogan as well as his way of speaking to the public. But it is perhaps not entirely incidental or accidental that Gezi Park produced an explosion. It is at least the case that the immediate issue did, in Babuscu's phrase, involve construction – literally so – the building of a building. This is not simply surprising – Erdogan has dedicated himself to a massive building program in Istanbul not to mention elsewhere. This had already occasioned complaints. But the building in question in Gezi Park is also striking in its own right – it will be the reconstruction of an Ottoman era barracks which once stood in Taksim Square. The history of this building has symbolic significance. For in 1909 the Ottoman troops in this barracks launched a failed coup to overturn constitutional concessions made by the Ottoman Sultan and Caliph. In Erdogan's vision "constructing the future" seems to mean the

renewal of the past – a past which was not notably democratic. In keeping with that spirit, Erdogan's assault on Gezi Park was not only, as so many said, disproportionate but unlawful. For the question of the building was in litigation and there existed a Turkish court stay order against any government action. It was the latter that brought the Gezi Park protestors to the park. Erdogan was not merely assaulting their beloved trees but the rule of law.

More and more over the years Erdogan seems to act as if the law is what he says it is.

This arbitrariness is one source of the opposition to his rule.

The other is the vision which it appears to serve. That appears to be a refounding of the Turkish Republic through a revival of its pre-Republican past, morally, religiously and politically. Erdogan has placed special emphasis on 3 upcoming dates – 2023, 2053, 2071. Each is an important anniversary. The first 2023 is the 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic. The second 2053 is the 600th anniversary of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople and the end of the Byzantine Empire; the third is the 1000th anniversary of the Battle of Manzikert and the victory of the Seljuk Turks over the Byzantines. It led to the Turkish conquest of Anatolia.

At the first, Erdogan hopes to preside as still ruler of Turkey. But he cannot in 2053; still less in 2071. But he has spoken fulsomely of forming new and more pious generations who will be his living legacy in those latter days.

It is fair to say that a fair portion of the public does not share this vision and at events don't see what it has to do with building a healthy democracy.

What is the bearing of these events for the other two large questions which were posed: First what may be their impact on democracy in the region? Second, what are their potential implications for Turkish American relations?

About the first – the impact on the region – it is easy to see that the implications are not promising. The region and especially the Arab countries have an altogether too rich and deep experience of the politics of will – of authoritarian will. What it needs is some model of consensual democratic politics with some due accommodation of religious sensibilities. For a while it seemed and was hoped that Turkey could provide that. But that is hardly the case today. Indeed some in Turkey and the region now argue that Erdogan's use of force has weakened his moral authority in the region, for example in situations like Syria. Another case, thus far less extreme, is Egypt. There both sides to the civil and political conflict, the Muslim Brotherhood government and its opponents, seem to have embraced the model of the politics of will, of majoritarian will, and each is willing to override democratic and constitutional forms. Turkey's recent political experience can hardly serve to moderate the parties.

As for Turkish American relations there now exists a serious problem. To be sure we have very deep and long relations with Turkey, both bilateral and within the context of NATO. These will no doubt continue. But in recent years our relations were put on a new and more ambitious footing. In 2009, Pres. Obama gave a speech in Ankara, his first in a Muslim capital, which looked forward to a special American relationship with Turkey. It was one in which Turkey, especially and even necessarily under the leadership of Erdogan, would play the leading role in the Middle East, both in its own behalf and ours. This was in part because Turkey had "unique insights into a whole host of regional and strategic challenges that we may face." It was also in part because Erdogan had been uniquely skillful in building a new Turkish politics, both domestically and internationally. The latter was the result of the new Turkish foreign policy which newly situated Turkey in the Muslim Middle East as an expressly Muslim power. Erdogan was the master of his own house and therefore poised to be master of the region.

Over the past two years and especially since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War there has been much reason to doubt Erdogan's mastery of the Middle East. So much so is this the case,

that Erdogan's recent visit to the US was aimed at persuading us to lift the burden of leadership from him.

Of course, he is still master of his own house but it is an increasingly troubled house. In addition to matters already cited, the Gezi Park events have liberated disputes about a whole host of additional issues – for example Turkish policy in Syria and the resolution of the Kurdish issue. Erdogan's electoral strength remains substantial but he now has a much more complicated task of domestic navigation. One might hope that these new difficulties might chasten and moderate Erdogan. So far, however, there is little sign of this.

But perhaps this might be abetted by the US. The US still seems to have or at least should have a good deal of credit with Erdogan given the great respect he has been shown. And it is clear that he still harbors a great interest in the closeness of his relations with the US and Pres. Obama. It is noteworthy that since Gezi Park he and his colleagues have attacked many outside parties but not the US. So perhaps he may be open to some friendly advice. It is certainly true that he and the prospects of regional democracy could use it. But such advice to be truly useful requires less deference and more candor than has been his experience of us in the past.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you for that testimony.
And, Mr. Gursel?

**STATEMENT OF MR. KADRI GURSEL, CONTRIBUTING WRITER
TO AL-MONITOR**

Mr. GURSEL. Respected members of the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats, I thank you for the opportunity to share my observations and thoughts on the meaning of the protest movement that started as a reaction to a police action on May 31.

So my observations go a bit beyond those of a veteran journalist. They are also personal as I live very close to the epicenter of the protests at Taksim Square. I myself suffered from the gas that police used so generously on the demonstrators.

The first question that must be answered here is what actually happened in Istanbul on May 31 and June and how to explain it. The shortest way to define it would be that it was a social eruption or social explosion.

The excessively harsh police intervention against a few hundred protesters in the early hours of May 31 was the final move that led to this explosion.

How did the events swell and reach the point of an explosion? And here is a short list of factors that contributed to the eruption. First of all, the inability of the mainstream media, which was under stiff government pressure to carry out its basic mission of informing the public and keeping tabs on the government; on the other hand, working on the line, the growing importance of the internet media and especially that of al-monitor.com, where I am a contributing writer, to contest this unabashed censorship by providing Turkish writers of different perspectives a forum to share their views in both Turkish and English.

The independence of the judiciary has been discarded as a result of the accumulation of power never before seen during periods of civilian rule in Turkey, which is the second factor. Most of the public feels the judiciary has been politicized and that ways to seek justice has been blocked.

The third one, arbitrary and prolonged political detentions further decreased confidence in the justice system.

The fourth is the role of religion in basic education has greatly increased, particularly in the last year, alienating many of Turkey's Alawites and secular citizens.

The fifth is over the last few months, authorities became intolerant of even minor protests and resorted to police violence to disperse them systematically.

The sixth is Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's advice to women at every opportunity, it seems, on how many children they should have and how they should give birth has fostered the perception of interference in personal lives.

Finally, the government imposed alcohol bans in May under the label of "regulating alcohol," causing a sizable part of society to feel that the government was intervening in their lifestyles and freedoms.

To keep this short list, which is a very short list, we must also add the Prime Minister's habit of using offensive language to deni-

grate the cultures and lifestyles of those who are not counted as his constituents.

It was Prime Minister Erdogan's policies and the pressure he brought to bear on the public with his narratives that led to this social explosion.

How then to analyze the sociopolitical chemistry of this explosion? The uprising was a spontaneous popular movement without an organization and leadership. The lead actor in this movement is the well-educated, urbanized young generation labeled by the Turkish media as "the '90s generation." Most of these young people place themselves outside of established politics. According to polls, they cite restrictions on their freedoms, Erdogan's authoritarianism, and police brutality as the main reasons behind their taking to streets. What they demand most is their freedoms and ending the violations of their rights.

To sum up, this is a new secular urban middle class' rebellion against Erdogan's rule. In sum, the social movement that began at Gezi Park discussed finding ways to defend their freedoms politically, now actually. This discussion is continuing in various formats today.

Since June 17, activists have been engaged in standstill protests in acts of passive disobedience. Every evening they organize synchronized forums in various Istanbul parks where free debate takes place.

The enrichment of the culture of democracy and spreading it to the masses where it will take root is a priceless and never-before-seen civil society movement. For civil society to take its due place as a key actor in the struggle for democracy is a sign of maturity and a healthy society.

Naturally, as I tried to explain at the beginning, this civil-social movement is a reaction of anger and resentment against Erdogan Government's Islamic conservatism, its policies that are sidestepping democratic freedoms in Turkey.

Prime Minister Erdogan's policies of societal polarization did not cost anything until May 31. But from now on, Mr. Erdogan will pay something for his policies of polarization. That price will be instability.

The social explosion in Turkey and government pressures that followed simply washed out the paradigm of the Turkey model based on the rule of the Justice and Development Party. This was advocated as a model for the Middle East and was accompanied by the term "Muslim democracy," even though it was not applicable.

AKP rule now has two roads to choose from. It has come to a junction.

It can finally take the steps needed for Turkey to become a real libertarian, pluralist, participatory and secular democracy and, as such, redefine the Turkey model, but correctly this time, or it can continue to drag Turkey toward an Islamic, authoritarian and oppressive regime. If AKP officials opt for the latter, they can't advance their cause without suppressing civil society. A more oppressive and more authoritarian regime cannot maintain stability in Turkey.

To finalize, it is impossible to give an unequivocal answer to a question frequently asked nowadays, whether a military coup is

among the risks to be face should Turkey destabilize even further. With the purges of 2010–2012, the ability of the military to stage coups has been made extraordinarily difficult. The military has been totally excluded from politics.

Thank you for your attention. And thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Gursel follows:]



**Testimony before the
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats**

Hearing on Turkey at a Crossroads: What do the Gezi Park Protests Mean for Democracy in the Region?

By Kadri Gursel
Contributing Writer, Al-Monitor.com

June 26, 2013

Respected members of the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats:

I thank you for the opportunity to share my observations and thoughts on the meaning of the protest movement that started as a reaction to a police action on May 31 against civil society activists who were camping out to protest the cutting down of trees in Gezi Park in Istanbul's Taksim district. The protests throughout Turkey. I will be addressing the impact of these protests on today's Turkey, and their future possible effects.

My observations go a bit beyond those of a veteran journalist. They are also personal as I live very close to the epicenter of the protests at Taksim Square. I myself suffered from the gas that police used so generously on the demonstrators.

The first question that must be answered here is what actually happened in Istanbul on May 31 and June 1, and how to explain it.

The shortest way to define it would be that it was a "social eruption" or "social explosion."

The excessively harsh police intervention against a few hundred protesters in the early hours of May 31 was the final move that led to this explosion. As soon the police assault was reported over social media, tens of thousands of people converged on the park, in Taksim Square, and the surrounding Beyoglu district of Istanbul. When the ensuing clashes between the people and the police could not be contained on June 1, the police were ordered to withdraw from Taksim Square.

How did the events swell and reach the point of an explosion?

Here is a short list of factors that contributed to the eruption:

- The inability of the mainstream media — which was under stiff government pressure — to carry out its basic mission of informing the public and keeping tabs on the

government. Its replacement of basic news reporting instincts with *unabashed* self-censorship has led a significant segment of the public to think that its right to be informed has been sidelined.

I should add here a quick note that Al-Monitor.com, where I am a contributing writer, has been a leader in independent digital media in Turkey, providing Turkish writers of different perspectives a forum to share their views in both Turkish and English.

- Instead of getting the separation of powers we were hoping for after the 2010 referendum, there has been a consolidation of power never before seen during periods of civilian rule in Turkey. The independence of the judiciary has been discarded. Most of the public feels the judiciary has been politicized and that access to justice has been blocked.
- Arbitrary and prolonged political detentions further decreased confidence in the justice system.
- The role of religion in basic education has greatly increased, particularly in the last year, alienating many of Turkey's Alevi and secular citizens.
- Over the last few months, authorities became intolerant of even minor protests and resorted to police violence to disperse them.
- The discrimination and marginalization applied to Alevis became systematic. Alevis, Turkish Alawites, an offshoot of Shia Islam, are believed to constitute 10 to 15 percent of Turkey's population.
- Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's advice to women, at every opportunity, it seems, on how many children they should have and how they should give birth has fostered the perception of interference in personal lives.
- Finally, although Turkey doesn't have a social problem called alcoholism, the government — acting as if there were such a problem — imposed alcohol bans in May under the label of "regulating alcohol," causing a sizable part of society to feel that the government was intervening in their lifestyles and freedoms.

To keep this short list, we must also add the prime minister's habit of using offensive language to denigrate the cultures and lifestyles of those who are not counted as his constituents.

It was Prime Minister Erdogan's policies and the pressure he brought to bear on the public with his narratives that led to this social explosion.

The inability of the political establishment and parliamentary opposition to offer hope to admonished and oppressed segments of society also helped facilitate this social eruption.

How then to analyze the sociopolitical chemistry of this explosion?

The uprising was a spontaneous popular movement without an organization and leadership. The lead actor in this movement is the well-educated, urbanized young generation labeled by the Turkish media as “the ‘90s generation.” Most of these young people place themselves outside of established politics. According to polls, they cite restrictions on their freedoms, Erdogan’s authoritarianism, and police brutality as the main reasons behind their taking to streets. What they demand most is their freedoms and ending the violations of their rights.

The difference between them and earlier rebellious generations is that this time, their parents are behind them. They are for peaceful demonstrations, humor and nonviolence. They keep themselves informed and communicate by social media, led by Twitter.

One of their common denominators is a preference for political secularism and their rejection of political conservatism. No valid findings could be unearthed to show that their understanding of secularism resembles the authoritarian secularism of Kemalist Turkey.

Some minor leftist organizations, which have a tradition of resistance and militancy, gave support to this social movement and were able to mobilize in the streets because of their organizational faculties. But none of them had the power, the political culture or the ideology to take this civilian social movement hostage and manipulate it.

In sum, the social movement that began at Gezi Park — in the 15 days of the protesters’ tent camp until they were dispersed by the police — discussed finding ways to defend their freedoms politically. This discussion is continuing in various formats today.

Since June 17, activists have been engaged in stand-still protests in acts of passive disobedience. Every evening they organize synchronized forums in various Istanbul parks where free debate takes place.

This enrichment of the culture of democracy and spreading it to the masses where it will take root is a priceless and never-before-seen civil society movement. For civil society to take its due place as a key actor in the struggle for democracy is a sign of maturity and a healthy society.

Naturally, as I tried to explain at the beginning, this civil-social movement is a reaction to the anger and resentment of the Erdogan government’s Islamic conservatism, its policies that — however you look at them — are sidestepping hard-earned democratic freedoms in Turkey.

This social explosion makes it imperative for us to examine why it happened and what it means for the Turkey of today — and tomorrow.

Prime Minister Erdogan's policies of societal polarization did not cost anything until May 31. But from now on, the government will pay something for its policies of dividing the society on Islamist/secular and Sunni/Alevi fault lines. That price will be instability.

The social explosion in Turkey and government pressures that followed simply washed out the paradigm of the "Turkey model" based on the rule of the Justice and Development Party, also known as the AKP. This was advocated as a model for the Middle East and was accompanied by the term "Muslim democracy," even though it was not applicable.

AKP rule now has two roads to choose from. It has come to a junction.

It can — with or without Erdogan — finally take the steps needed for Turkey to become a real libertarian, pluralist, participatory and secular democracy and as such redefine the "Turkey model" (but correctly this time), or it can continue to drag Turkey toward an Islamic, authoritarian and oppressive regime. If AKP officials opt for the latter, they can't advance their cause without suppressing civil society. A more oppressive and more authoritarian regime cannot maintain stability in Turkey.

One of the prerequisites of stability is the sound management of the peace process with the Kurds. If Turkey abandons democracy, that won't be possible.

It is impossible to give an unequivocal answer to a question frequently asked nowadays: whether a military coup is among the risks to be faced should Turkey destabilize even further. With the purges of 2010-2012, the ability of the military to stage coups has been made extraordinarily difficult. The military has been totally excluded from politics.

The progress of the Turkish economy has to be observed closely. 2014 and 2015 are election years, bringing to mind the possibility that this authoritarian leader may be stiffly challenged at the ballot box should he persist with his decisions and choices that are taking Turkey on a non-democratic path.

Thank you for your attentions and for this opportunity.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much for your thoughtful testimony and for the testimony of all of our witnesses today. I am going to take a little poll. Maybe you could just tell me. Before this upheaval happened and this violence started in the park, before the police weighed in with their billy clubs and ignited something, did you believe that there was a tension and a seething underneath the surface in Turkey that was of the magnitude that we have seen manifest itself since that ignition point? Did you think that this could happen? Just give me a yes or no. Mr. Ambassador?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Yes, sir.

Mr. FRADKIN. Yes.

Mr. CAGAPTAY. Not the timing.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. What is that now?

Mr. CAGAPTAY. Yes, but not the timing.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. GURSEL. Yes for the resentment, no for the timing.

Mr. USTUN. Yes with some objections.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Oh, my gosh. All right. Thank you for that. I will have to tell you I didn't. So you guys are a lot smarter over there than those of us are up here. That is why we are having you testify.

I really saw—perhaps it was an illusion, and perhaps it was not. It seemed to me that we had a demonstration of Islamic democratic government that was reasonable and could again serve as a model and was reaching out to its own people in the democratic process.

I always looked at, for example, the fact that women before—and correct me if I am wrong—were not permitted to wear head scarves when the old military, pro military, regime was in. And freedom is when a woman has the right to wear a head scarf but also the right not to wear a head scarf. And if the new government or if the Erdogan Government would then move to the point that it was mandating that, well, then it would begin, as you were mentioning, traipsing on the fundamental freedoms of the people.

Was this alcohol restriction—I have heard one example of that. Were there other restrictions that I have missed that were being again over the line where you would say that freedom aligned that the Erdogan administration was having other than restricting alcohol is because of someone's religious beliefs, that Islam does not believe in that? So were there other restrictions that we are causing the people to be upset, whoever has an answer for that? Mr. Ambassador, any—

Ambassador JEFFREY. Simply to say in our own country, sir, as you know, we prohibited alcohol for many years. As an imbibor of alcohol, I am personally not in favor of that, but I just want to show how complicated democracy is as it rubs up against what people see as their personal freedoms. And, thus, I would segregate this from religion in general or the specific religion of Islam and simply state that this struggle between authoritarian thought processes, even with a majority government and minority rights, we have seen all over the world in many different kinds of countries as countries, including many of our allies, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, evolved. And that is what we are seeing.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, did we see, in this regime, for the last 10 years, was there a violation of people's freedom of speech, for example? Mr. Ustun, why don't we go with—

Mr. USTUN. Yes. There are no laws that were passed about restricting freedom of speech in Turkey. And there is a very harsh criticism of the government in newspapers and TVs and everywhere. There have been concerns about media issues, but there are structural problems that date back to the '90s and before where the relationship between sort of big media conglomerates and businesses, those kinds of relationships make the media, sort of journalists' lives a little more difficult because they have to kind of sort of go along with what the bosses want. In the past, they would call on the military to intervene. But today they are doing other things.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Does anyone else have an observation about freedom of speech under this administration? Yes, sir? And then we will go with you.

Mr. USTUN. Let me defer to the Turkish journalist.

Mr. GURSEL. Okay. Well, let me give you an example on that. Since 2008, I don't remember having read any news story covering government corruption in the mainstream media, since 2008.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right. No, because they have eliminated all government corruption there?

Mr. GURSEL. So does it mean that in Turkey, there is no corruption? I don't believe. I don't think so. And then the main instinct replaced the instinct of news in the desk, news desk, is the censorship. And it was proven on the night of May 31, when there was the events in Istanbul's streets. A few hundred meters away, TV channels were broadcasting. One TV channel was broadcasting a live debate about schizophrenia. And the other one was, well, broadcasting a serial document on England—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Let's just note for the record that—

Mr. GURSEL [continuing]. Dropping the formal—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Let me just note for the record I did ask for some recommendations from the Turkish Embassy. And they were very gracious in recommending at least one witness for us today. And I appreciate that very much, who they thought would be adding to the discussion. And that witness has added to the discussion.

Are there journalists in jail right now? And then I will have one more question and then go to my ranking member. Are there journalists in jail right now in Turkey? Yes?

Mr. GURSEL. May I again answer this question, please, because I am IPI National Committee chairman, and I am a press freedom activist also?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right.

Mr. GURSEL. There are more than 60 journalists now in jail in Turkey.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Say that again.

Mr. GURSEL. Sixty journalists.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Sixty?

Mr. GURSEL. More than 60. And they are mostly pro Kurdish journalists. They are mostly pro Kurdish journalists. And there is a discussion on them. Maybe Mr. Ustun can answer. I don't know. But there are, according to OECD and other international organizations defending freedom of the press, more than 60 journalists.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Dr. Ustun?

Mr. USTUN. I had this in my testimony as well. We have enacted an anti-terror law in Turkey. Because of the terror environment, we have a law that makes it difficult to further democratization. The judicial system is so archaic. And this anti-terror law, basically if you are praising the PKK organization, then you could be subject to detention and jail time.

But this was changed very recently. The reform package passed in the Parliament, which basically makes the praising of the PKK organization not a crime. So, going forward, that is going to help. But, as Gursel was saying, there are a lot of small-time journalists.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I am going over my time here.

Mr. USTUN. Yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Ambassador, do you have something very quickly to answer to that?

Ambassador JEFFREY. No. As our colleagues have said, it has been a tension. There is a great deal of information out there in Turkey that is available to the citizens. And there have been restrictions. Many of these restrictions date well before the AKP, as we have heard. The AKP has eliminated some of them and has, particularly recently, raised new questions.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So we have to put it in an historical perspective.

I will now turn to my ranking member. I am sorry I am over but as many questions as long as you want.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would just like to ask each of you, each of you individually, to comment on this. I want you to cite for me, if you could, specific, specific instances of outside influence with the demonstrations at Gezi Park. And I will start with Ambassador Jeffrey and maybe go right across there. I want to see if this collective group here, so knowledgeable on these issues, can cite one specific example of that outside influence and who they are.

Ambassador JEFFREY. By my definition of outside influence, there was none. By the definition of some——

Mr. KEATING. But yours.

Ambassador JEFFREY. I will stop there.

Mr. FRADKIN. None, Congressman.

Mr. CAGAPTAY. Absolutely none whatsoever.

Mr. GURSEL. I repeat. Absolutely not.

Mr. USTUN. Yes. The third group I talked about, DHKP-C, involved in the attack on the U.S. Embassy, involved in the Reyhanli attack, these are connected to the Assad regime in Syria.

Mr. KEATING. And they were active participants in the——

Mr. USTUN. Yes.

Mr. KEATING. Yes, Mr. Gursel?

Mr. GURSEL. Thank you.

I have to object because every day I have been on the place, on the square, in the square, Taksim Square. I observed very closely the tension of the political groups existing in the resistance. I think the hard core of the resistance is the uncoordinated, unorganized middle class new generation of the secular modern urban middle class.

Mr. KEATING. Dr. Ustun?

Mr. GURSEL. The second group, you know, are the members of some organizations.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you. Thank you.

Dr. Ustun——

Mr. USTUN. PKK was there.

Mr. KEATING. Yes. Okay.

Mr. USTUN. Other socialist groups were there. But personally I didn't notice any banner or——

Mr. KEATING. I just wanted to go back for a second——

Mr. USTUN [continuing]. Anything representing DHKP-C.

Mr. KEATING [continuing]. If I could. Doctor, that group you said, they are domestic, aren't they? So when you say they are——

Mr. GURSEL. They have historically been supported by the Syrian regime, just like the PKK in the past. But their big, huge banner was on the Ataturk Cultural Center while CNN was broadcasting live. And in the background, you could see DHKP-C's and Abdullah Ocalan's pictures up there.

Technically PKK and the government are talking, but PKK is still technically an illegal organization in Turkey.

Mr. KEATING. A domestic group?

Mr. USTUN. Yes.

Mr. KEATING. Okay. That is what I wanted to know. Thank you.

Mr. USTUN. With foreign ties.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

I have another question, just to get a little more sense of Gezi Park and what happened there. I would like to ask Mr. Gursel just to describe, if he could, who are the protestors who were there. Were they diverse ethnic groups? Did they have different political backgrounds? Were they mostly men or women? Are they violent or harassing toward those who didn't support their views?

We just saw here what we saw on television. I just wanted to get a sense from you as someone firsthand. You know, could you describe, who are those people?

Mr. GURSEL. Well, at the hard core of the resistance, at Gezi Park, those people were the youngsters coming out from their homes to protest and to resist what was going on for their liberties and for their future, for themselves. And it is typically a middle class movement, but others, there were some other groups which in the past have used violence as a political tool, such as PKK, maybe other groups. But there were also many, many groups that were in unease with the government, like, for example, feminists, like anarchists, like anti-capitalists, Muslims, or environmentalists, who opposed staunchly the policies of government.

But in Gezi Park, there weren't any incidents reported. I didn't hear anything happened between those groups. There was a growing dialogue between them. And it still continues, and even the Kemalists. There were Kemalists with the heavy burden of the Kemalist Republican past. There also they have engaged political dialogue with other groups. And they have also accepted the existence of Mr. Erdogan's posters on the square——

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

Mr. GURSEL [continuing]. At the end of the day.

Mr. KEATING. Answer this if you want when I ask the group just another question, if I could. There were some reports that the

Turkish Government response to the protests were not completely uniform and some voices within the AK Party were encouraging cooperation and calm. And, at least according to some preliminary statements, however, once the Prime Minister returned from his travels, he used force against those protestors. Does this represent like a miscommunication within the party, a misreporting, or was there indeed, to your knowledge, some difference of opinion as to how to approach this within the party itself?

And do you see these—if there are, indeed, those differences, what would be the implications going forward? I would throw it open to anyone. Ambassador Jeffrey?

Ambassador JEFFREY. There certainly was. For example, both President Gul and Deputy Prime Minister Arinc at one point came out, apologized, and urged restraint on the part of the authorities toward the demonstrators and some understanding of them. But it goes further than that.

Even Prime Minister Erdogan when he returned, his original position was to take a moderate stance. He invited in and spent hours talking to representatives of the demonstrators. He then announced that he would adhere to the decision of the court to stay the tearing down of Gezi Park and that if in the end, the court decided the state could go forward with it, he would not do so until there would be a referendum on that.

This was on Friday, a week ago Friday. And then the next day, he had a change in position. And he used force against the demonstrators, not only in Taksim Square, which is a major vehicle artery, but also in Gezi Park itself.

So I think that there is a back and forth within the government that I find in some perverse way encouraging because it shows that people are trying to figure out, how do we deal with at least a large minority that disagrees with us on fundamental issues. And this is how democracies stumble forward.

Mr. KEATING. Anyone else? Dr. Ustun?

Mr. USTUN. The first couple of days, there was definitely a management, crisis management, issue. But, Ambassador, what he is mentioning is correct. What happened on Sunday, however, when the police left the square, Taksim Square, and moved out of that area, moved to Dolma Bagche, where the Prime Minister's office is there. These organized illegal groups tried to storm this office as well as they tried to do it simultaneously in Ankara. Once that was done, the Prime Minister decided these people are not there for the park, but they are organizing sort of uprising or what—they're trying to inflame the situation and hijack the protests. So that's why you saw a hard-line attitude afterwards.

And there was a lot of disinformation, incredible amount of disinformation about people being hurt, getting killed. According to one journalist's Twitter account, you could count 20 people dead in the first day. So there was a lot of inflammatory information flow. And the main news channels reported it around the clock, but they did not do live broadcasts from the area.

But by the second day, things were out of control. And then later on, the things really grew. People reacted to this. And there are all these different diverse groups that Gursel was talking about.

Mr. KEATING. Yes. My time is over, too. So if one of the remaining panelists could just answer that same question, that would be——

Mr. FRADKIN. I certainly agree with Ambassador Jeffrey that there was this kind of tension and disagreement. The difficulty it seems to me now is that since Prime Minister Erdogan came back, changed his position, since that time, he has done everything he can to reassert his view of things in this very large number of speeches he is giving and to insist on a very perverse interpretation of the events which took place.

One example that struck me, during the events in Taksim, people naturally sought help for their injuries or for having been gassed. A group went into a mosque solely for the purpose of finding a secure place to be treated.

Prime Minister Erdogan has described this as essentially an assault on the mosque. He claims that people ran in there with beers to desecrate the mosque. He claims that they bothered female worshippers, that they walked in there with shoes. The imam of the mosque has declared this to be absolutely false publicly. But Prime Minister Erdogan returns to this over and over again in his speeches about in a way——

Mr. KEATING. If I could interrupt? The purpose of the hearing is not to litigate those individual issues but——

Mr. FRADKIN. No, no. I meant——

Mr. KEATING. I wanted to thank all of you. I am just way over my time.

Mr. FRADKIN. Okay.

Mr. KEATING. But I did get the sense of all of you. And I do think this kind of discussion is helpful. It has been helpful to the U.S. in their history to look back at themselves and have an open discourse about these things.

And you are such an important ally, Turkey is, that, you know, I hope that kind of introspective view, painful as it can be at times, is helpful.

And I yield back.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Lowenthal, I believe, is next.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Well, thank you for educating us. I am wondering, you know, a little bit more about the balance that is going on in Turkey between secularism and more Islamic beliefs and what that dynamic is like and especially within the AKP Party itself.

Can you explain to us just where—for our interpretation, it seems to have been drifted more away from a secular. And, yet, I would like to understand, what is going on within the AKP Party itself. Are they experiencing this? And are there forces to pull it in both directions within the party itself? Yes?

Mr. CAGAPTAY. Thank you, Congressman Lowenthal. I think it is a great question. It allows us to delve into the current polarization of Turkish society along this——

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Yes.

Mr. CAGAPTAY [continuing]. Dividing line. Let me take the government's alcohol policy, on which there was a question earlier from the chairman as well. Turkey is a Muslim-majority country. And consumption of alcohol is considered a sin by some Muslims.

So the regulation of consumption and sale of alcohol, therefore, blurs the lines between government and religion in a Muslim-majority country. It is not just a health care or social policy issue. It is an issue about the separation of religion and government.

Therefore, the limitation of sale of alcohol, denial of alcohol licenses to stores and businesses I think represents a blurring of that line. I think for many Turks who would not consider the consumption of alcohol as a sin or do not care that it is a sin, this is a government legislating what should be considered a sin by some into what should be a crime.

And I think that is a dividing line that has been, unfortunately, activated in the last few years because of some of the legislation passed by the government.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Others? This is for all the panel.

Mr. USTUN. The party is a conservative democratic party. So it pursues a conservative agenda. There is no doubt about that.

If secularism moved away from something, it moved away from the French style toward more U.S. style, where you tolerate all sorts of religions and religious beliefs. The party is a very diverse party. It received 50 percent of the votes of countries. So this is a very diverse country. There is a discussion within the party. There is no doubt about that.

When it comes to alcohol regulations, though, the restrictions are based on World Health Organization suggestions. They didn't come up with them themselves. And they are actually less restrictive than those implied in this country, in the United States.

And it basically regulates the—you used to be able to send your teenage son to buy alcohol for yourself. And they would sell alcohol in the night hours. So there are regulations adopted on those issues, but they didn't come up with those regulations themselves. They are based on E.U. and World Health Organization guidelines.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Mr. Gursel?

Mr. GURSEL. Thank you.

Well, according to OECD figures, in Turkey, the pure alcohol consumption per person, per adult person, per year is only 1.5 liters. And Turkey is the least alcohol-consuming country in the OECD while the average is 10.5. And these measures are really overstretching measures. And then it colors the perception of advancing of an Islamic agenda by an important person of the public.

And then also the Prime Minister defended the so-called alcohol regulation by Islamic references also one time. And then according to the transformation of the political Islam, well, I adopted—this party is neo-Islamist, but now to be a neoist, in my opinion, you should preserve the secular system while being against the secularization of the society. But now the system is becoming more or less under the heavy pressure of an Islamic or Islamist agenda coming under the pressure for about 1 year or more under the heavy-handed approaches of Mr. Erdogan.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Dr. Fradkin?

Mr. FRADKIN. I think some of these things appear from outside as relatively small impositions or restrictions, as was talked about earlier. And, in fact, they are, partly for the reason that was just mentioned. Very few Turks are drinkers.

But there seems to be a desire on the part of the government and the party to make a particular point of this and express itself in other points as well; for example, lately a campaign directed against couples kissing in public.

So the sense is that there is kind of a censoriousness about some of the regulations and some of the rhetoric that associates with them.

And the other part of it is a large building program that has been undertaken by the government, especially to build more and more mosques and especially a giant mosque, which will be on the Asian side of the Bosphorus.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Ambassador?

Ambassador JEFFREY. It is a very, very good question, Mr. Congressman. It is also one that gets us all on thin ice. And, as you can see, we have gotten different views here, all of which I agree with, even though in some respects, they are contradictory because the subject is contradictory. I will try, without getting into, I hope, trouble, to explain this very quickly but in a little bit of context.

The United States view of secularism is a very interesting one because we are, by and large, a religious country that has very strong barriers, usually not crossed, about keeping religion out of the political system for a variety of reasons, including the many different kinds of religions we have.

In Turkey, there is a from both sides—the secular side took a very—it was mentioned earlier, but it is an important point. The French form of laicite, or secularism, which is quite aggressive, in France against the Catholic Church 200 years ago with the revolution—and some of these ideas have passed won. In Turkey, this is manifest by the head scarf ban that was in effect for many years. And we are seeing a sort of mirror image of this with some of the actions by the current government.

In both cases, what is seemingly missing is respect for the private sphere of people, be they religious or be they non-religious, be they followers of religious precepts or be they not too concerned about them.

There has been a consistent trend, regardless of the government, over a long period of time to challenge the right of people to do this. We see this now. We saw it 20 years ago.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Thank you. I yield back my time.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much. And we now turn to Mr. Meeks.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Chairman, thank you and to Ranking Member Keating. Let me first say that I actually come to this hearing today with democracy very heavy on my mind. I talk about the democracy here in the United States. I will admit outright that it is from this prism of democracy that I know best and its evolution and that I approach the question of this hearing post, is Turkey at a cross-roads, what do recent protests mean for democracy in the region, the democracy, our democracy, here in the United States after more than 200 years is still working toward perfection.

Yesterday the United States Supreme Court issued a ruling that gutted one of our Nation's landmark civil rights: The Voting Rights Act. That ruling was devastating to communities in this country who have been fighting attempts to suppress their right to vote.

Discouraging pain of the past and present *de jure* and *de facto* racism came rushing at those of us who lived through it and fight for it now. Sadly, that is and was the America that I have known. On the other hand, today the Supreme Court issued rulings that bring our Nation significantly closer to our aspirations of equality and our society. The point is we are indeed still an evolving country.

This hearing about Turkey, the legacy of our evolution is instructive here, I believe. Contrary to what some have suggested, I believe that the protests in Turkey are a sign of the strengthening of the democratic engagement of civil society. Protestors have power. And they are demonstrating that they know how to use it.

It is my hope for Turkey, as it is for America, that we are judged by our positive steps toward a better society, rather than the mistakes we have made along the way, for, surely, the United States has made mistakes also.

I don't want to be judged as a country by those mistakes. I want to be judged by the positiveness. It is also my hope that my colleagues encourage the Government of Turkey to embrace positive deepening of its democracy, as were most evident in the early steps of the current governing party. Those early steps should not be overlooked, nor forgotten by this committee or members of the United States Congress, a balancing of power of the military and major economic reforms toward advancing to E.U. accession talks, in my estimation, with no small fear.

The future of the E.U. accession talks have already been affected by the ongoing protests. But I believe both Turkey and the E.U. would lose if the accession talks remained blocked.

So I have great hopes for the future of Turkey. With that, I want to just focus on that for a second and ask questions, I guess, to Dr. Ustun and to both Mr. Gursel and I will hear from the Ambassadors also. And I don't mind if everybody peeks in. The success of the U.S. administration's—and many Members of Congress have long supported Turkey's accession to the E.U. And at times, however, the United States pressure on E.U. actors regarding Turkey's membership prospects have generated tension.

How important is Turkey's potential accession and continuing the accession process amid current difficulties in Turkey and E.U. relationships? And what, if anything, can and should the United States do to continue to promote Turkey's E.U. accession?

Mr. USTUN. I think Turkey is very grateful to the U.S. for the support it gives on E.U. membership. And it has proceeded strongly. And many reforms passed in Turkey, thanks to your E.U. support and funds and everything like that.

But E.U.'s internal problems and internal questioning of whether Islam is sort of—Turkey as an Islamic country could actually be in the E.U., has raised questions. That question is now much bigger for the E.U. And E.U.'s internal economic problems now created sort of several E.U.'s, if you will. So those kinds of problems are preventing progress on that front, but Turkey still considers it as a strategic goal. The President mentioned that, the Prime Minister, and all of that.

Yesterday's news about the opening of the regional policy chapter was very good news on that front. And Germany has criticized the

handling of these protests. But I think we will move forward there. So I am more hopeful that there have been serious problems because the E.U. stalled Turkey on those accounts.

Mr. MEEKS. Let's just go across. And then I will be done.

Mr. GURSEL. The recent events, incidents in Istanbul and all over Turkey proved again that the E.U., that for Turkey, there is no alternative to E.U. perspective. The E.U. perspective is still the anchor for a sustainable democracy to establish the creative sustainable democracy for Turkey, even though there was no E.U. flag during the protest, et cetera.

But that doesn't change the reality. The stalemate must be overcome. And to overcome the stalemate, maybe the U.S. can play a facilitating role beginning from the Cyprus question, which blocks our way, our E.U. perspective. And the pressure over the government from the society and from other actors to pursue. And to stick with the E.U. perspective is very important at the moment.

Mr. CAGAPTAY. Thank you, Congressman Meeks. I also think that Turkey's E.U. accession is of incredible value to Turks and also to the United States. And I think U.S. support for Turkey's accession has made that process possible. If not for that, Turkey would not be where it is today.

I don't think Turkey's need for the E.U. is any more on the economic front. The country has grown in leaps and bounds in the last decade. And Europe has not. And the Turks don't any more feel that Europe is the gauge of prosperity. But Europe is the gate to liberal democracy and I think for the following reason: Turkey has, roughly speaking, two disparate halves.

As Ambassador Jeffrey stated, the country's model of secularism has switched from one to the other. Turkey used to subscribe to the European model of secularism, which basically meant freedom from religion in government and education. Now they move to the American model, which is freedom of religion in government and education.

For many countries, I think one or other model works. For Turkey, you need both. This country has people of different religious persuasions and convictions and practices, although it is mostly Muslim. At the same time, I think Turkey needs, for instance, a constitution. That would provide freedom of religion and freedom from religion so that secular, conservative, liberal Turks would all feel welcome in this new country. And the only way it can get there is through the anchor of the European Union, which would be the soft power force to push for political liberalization so that the country's two disparate halves could feel that they could live together. And the road to that goes through a new constitution. And the path of that goes through the country's prized goal of European Union accession. So I think E.U. is the anchor of political liberalization in Turkey.

Mr. FRADKIN. Like my colleagues, I think that it would be a very good idea. It was a good idea in the past. And it would be a good idea at present. And if the United States can move that forward, that would be all to the good. But it seems extremely unlikely under the present circumstances.

On the one hand, what happened in Turkey has given those opponents of accession in the E.U. an excuse for denying, stopping

the process, which has now stopped until October. And, on the other hand, it has created for premise for everyone Europe a kind of a punching bag, which he has been using regularly in order to appeal to his supporters.

So neither side looks like they want to actually get together at the moment. And it is hard to see how they would be brought, that would be brought forward under the present circumstances. Maybe if things calm down or the other possibility is it seems to me what was mentioned earlier, that the eruption of Gezi Park is the eruption to which you referred, the eruption of civil society.

And if that civil society becomes stronger and if, as appears to be the case, it really does yearn for the kinds of political forums that are characteristic of the E.U., then it is more likely that it would go forward. But then it would have a clear base within Turkish politics and perhaps overcome European objections.

Ambassador JEFFREY. First, the E.U. accession process itself and eventually entry is a very good thing for Turkey. Secondly, as someone who has lived even longer in Europe than in Turkey, it is a good thing for European. Turkey geographically, at least part of the country, by the ethnic composition of much of its population, by its history, is part of the European realm. It is economically now a powerhouse that would help the European Union in many respects. So what is the problem?

And certainly it isn't that Turkey is all that different. It has a very strong orientation toward Europe. There are millions of Turks in Germany and so forth. I think this is a very important process. The American Government supports it. We get in trouble all the time with the Europeans by making these recommendations.

I think we earned the right from 1941 to 1989 and beyond to give advice to our friends and allies. They can not listen to us if they want.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And we ask unanimous consent Mr. Connolly be given the rights as a ex-officio member of the committee to proceed with his 5 minutes of questions. Hearing no objection, so ordered. Mr. Connolly, you may proceed.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank goodness Mr. Meeks couldn't hear that last part there about objections. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I wanted to be here today as the co-chairman of the Congressional Caucus of Turkey. And I really thank you and the ranking member for your graciousness in allowing me to participate.

First of all, Ambassador Jeffrey, I hear a fellow New Englander. Where are you from?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Saugus, Mass.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Saugus? Okay.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Just north of Boston.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I can talk that way, too, if I have to. [Laughter.] But I don't normally.

To make a point, I think, to follow up on some of the points you were making, Mr. Ambassador, if one looked at the United States from 1965 through, say, 1968, very turbulent period in this country, there were riots in most major urban areas of America during that time period, were there not? You may want to verbally acknowledge, Mr. Ambassador.

Ambassador JEFFREY. There were.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And in 1968, was there not a major conflagration in the City of Chicago during the pendency of a major party convention to try to determine the next President of the United States to have a state that subsequently was referred to by a formal commission as a police riot? Is that not true?

Ambassador JEFFREY. That is true.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Could one construe fairly that with those turbulent years and those very difficult and in some cases terrible events, that somehow that proved that America was not up to its democratic ideals or, indeed, its democratic institutions were false?

Ambassador JEFFREY. As one who was very involved in that period, I would say it proved that, a) there were great fissures in American society at that time and that we worked through them in different ways that proceeded on through the '70s and that we emerged from it a stronger democracy.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I think you have just put your finger right on it. I think that is the question, not that there are difficulties in a country, not that there are in some cases sometimes violent demonstrations in a democracy, though they are to be avoided if we can.

But what does the country do with that dissent? Does it make it stronger or does it, in fact, force it or encourage it to fall back on autocratic processes that hinder democratization? It seems to me that is the existential moment for Turkey right now. I wonder if you could enlighten us because I have heard sort of contrary messages coming from the Turkish Government.

Initially, Prime Minister Erdogan reacted pretty harshly to the very fact that there were any demonstrations and called demonstrators names. But then other members of his government, the President himself, and I think you pointed out or somebody pointed out a Deputy Minister—actually, there were noises about apologies for the overreaction of police and a statement of respect for the sincerity of the demonstrators.

There was hope after those statements that Prime Minister Erdogan returned to Ankara, that his words might echo some of that conciliatory rhetoric. They seem not to. I wonder, Ambassador Jeffrey, if you could help us a little bit sort of divine what are we to conclude from these mixed messages coming from officials of the Turkish Government with respect to the import of these demonstrations.

Ambassador JEFFREY. I would yield to some of the people here who know the country better than I, but I would say that we have another example. Just yesterday not only did President Obama speak with the Prime Minister, but the U.S. statement issued after it, the Prime Minister also described a situation in Turkey. The two leaders discussed the importance of nonviolence and of the rights to free expression of assembly and of free press. Such statements usually, to one or another degree, jointly not only do they reflect the truth, but they usually reflect a certain understanding, at least, if not agreement, before it goes out. So I would take this as another step, moving back.

Again, we get to your first question, sir, which is this is a very tumultuous movement, I think forward. I could be wrong, but I would like to ask the others.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Certainly. Do other members of the panel wish to comment?

Mr. FRADKIN. Yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes, Dr. Fradkin and Dr. Cagaptay?

Mr. FRADKIN. I think that, you know, it is very useful to draw the analogy that you did or the comparison anyway. And it certainly could be the case that the kinds of results or progress in democratic life will result from this explosion. The obstacles to it, it seems to me, are a couple. One was referred to earlier by some of my colleagues, I think, in particular, Mr. Gursel, that we had the benefit in the '60s, which I remember extremely well, of certain institutions and also the rotation of the parties, which permitted people to sort of say how they wanted to go in the future and also to restrain the passions that are characteristic of democratic life. The question is whether Turkey has the conditions for the restraint of those passions or a means for expressing them in its political life. I am not saying it doesn't, but this is certainly new. And it is not clear that it does.

Mr. CAGAPTAY. Thank you, Congressman Connolly. I agree with my friend and colleague Ambassador Jeffrey that this is Turkey moving forward for the following reasons. It has become in the last decade, largely thanks to sound economic policies implemented by the AKP Government a majority middle class society for the first time in history.

By the end of this decade, about 80 percent of Turks will be classified as middle class. What is more important, Turkey is about to attain universal literacy. And this will be first ever for a large Muslim-majority country in human history.

These two developments are irreversible. They represent a society that has become too mature, too middle class, too literate, too connected to the world to fit into a one-size-fits-all straitjacket conservatism. That is why I think you are seeing an outburst of anger on the streets, as some of my panelists have indicated, but I think what you are seeing is beyond that anger.

What was interesting, in Istanbul the last month is that, first, you had a pretty significant pro-environmental movement that tried to save a park from being converted into a shopping mall. People care for the trees. That would not have been the case in Turkey 10 years ago. That is a product of a decade of growth and prosperity and middle class values: Respect for the environment. That has been born out of the AKP success.

What is more important is that when the police cracked down on the pro-environment sit-in, in the middle of the night, at 2 o'clock a.m. in the morning, hundreds of thousands of people came onto the streets to defend the rights of those other people to protest. I think that is a sign of maturity. It indicates that people are saying, "I may not agree with what they are doing, but they have the right to assembly and free speech."

And I think that represents a way forward for the country because the country is arriving at a point of a large middle class which demands respect for individual freedoms, including freedom

of assembly, association, media expression, and respect for individual space, as well as the environment.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Before we proceed—my time is up. And it is entirely up to the chairman whether he wishes to allow additional comments. I thank the chair.

Mr. GURSEL. Well, I think in Turkey, where there are no real checks and balances, no effective or efficient opposition, no free press, at the end of the day, I can say this social explosion shakes the dynamics or the statistics of the government, political status of the government, and shows the government their limits. And then it must be understood.

The limits for Mr. Erdogan's power has been drawn in Taksim on the 1st of June. And then these people, now they are continuing to their social movement without the support of the extremist groups in parks, at their homes, and in many parts of the social life. They are stripped from them.

And then these people, the middle class, the urban, secular middle class, as Mr. Cagaptay has said, they are connected to the words. And at this age, where there is this highly educated, the new middle class term of—I mean, I use the term to remark that they are the wage earners. And they are very skilled people. I mean, they are the potential owners of the E.U. project of Turkey if the project is offered to them in a convincing way because the project now, actually, is in the deep freeze.

And then this is—and at this age, to finalize, social engineering is impossible. This is one last message that this government or Mr. Erdogan himself has to get from the social explosion.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And, to top it off, Dr. Ustun?

Mr. USTUN. Mr. Chairman, your earlier question, did you expect it, and I said, "Yes, with some objections." The reason was that there is a context to all of this. AK Party has had all of these successes at the ballot box. And now it is trying to tackle the sort of burning issues, such as the Kurdish question and new civilian constitution. These have also created discontent. There are people who are not happy about the Kurdish settlement process, and they are not sure what is happening and et cetera.

But the tension was there. So we could tell that this tension had to come out somehow. And, also, there is discontent about the serial policy.

But the reason the language changed over time and you hear mixed messages is that evolution of the protests. Don't forget the Prime Minister met with the protestors in two different meetings. And he said that "I understand your concerns."

And the government issued an apology as well. But he was directing his comments about groups who want to occupy the park, not just protest, but occupy and then continuously protest whenever they wanted. So there he had to draw the line and say, "There is the rule of law. And you have to abide by the rules."

Thank you.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much.

I think we have had some very thought-provoking testimony today. Just a few thoughts in closing. There were some expressions of optimism that I noted, even from the beginning, where we talked about the development of a middle class in Turkey that—perhaps

these demonstrations reflect the development of a middle class who—you know, I ain't going to take it anymore or something that could lead, as we talked about, to an actual greater demand of the population for democratic principles and respect for their rights. And we heard that expression from Mr. Meeks as well. And so Mr. Meeks was sort of mirroring that testimony about a strong middle class.

We would hope that Turkey uses this episode of turmoil as a vehicle to move closer, rather than further away from democratic government. And because, as Mr. Connolly pointed out, we have had instances like this in the United States. And some of the turmoil that we have gone through has helped us make decisions that needed to be made. And we needed to change direction. And so turmoil is either going to be assigned as a growing pain, which is an indication of past progress, or it could be seen also that past progress is in jeopardy. So we will be watching this very closely.

And one last thought is that years ago, when I was a young man, I found myself in Istanbul. And I was staying in a 50-cent-a-night hotel, I might add. And it was quite an experience. And I decided that I wanted to swim between Europe and Asia. And, in fact, the real truth of the matter was I decided I was going to do that because I knew it would impress women and I needed all the leverage I could get.

What happens is I went down. I found a spot that looked like it was the closest between the areas there between Europe and Asia and the Bosphorus there. And I started to sort of get my—I had my swimming suit underneath my pants there. And I started getting ready to jump in. And I was 20 years old then. And a young fellow about 5, 6 years older than me, a Turkish young man, came up to me and said, "What are you doing?"

I said, "Well, I am going to swim between Europe and Asia."

And he said, "Are you out of your mind?"

And I said, "No."

He says, "You know, this is very treacherous water here. You know," he says, "I'll tell you what. My friend and I will row beside you in our little boat." They had a little rowboat there. Thank God, they did. I tell you, I would have panicked three-fourths of the way because it is really cold. And the water is very treacherous there. There are whirlpools and things. And knowing that they were rowing beside me gave me the confidence to keep going. And I actually made the journey between Europe and Asia.

And I will just say this, that we should remember that during the Cold War and during that experience that I had with myself right there, it couldn't have been better a situation than to have a strong Turkish person as my friend right next to me. And that is the way we should look in the future as well. We need to have the Turkish people beside us as friends. And friends give advice to one another.

And our advice now is to try to reconcile any differences that you have that have been brought up by this turmoil and use the turmoil that we have experienced in Turkey as a means to make things better, rather than as a means to attack one's enemies. And if we do that, Turkey will end up a stronger country for it. And the United States will be better off as well because we will have Turks

right next to us rowing the boat to make sure that we are safe. So thank you all very much.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:02 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), Chairman

June 25, 2013

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available on the Committee website at www.foreignaffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Wednesday, June 26, 2013

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: Turkey at a Crossroads: What do the Gezi Park Protests Mean for Democracy in the Region?

WITNESSES: Hillel Fradkin, Ph.D.
Director
Center on Islam, Democracy and the Future of the Muslim World
Hudson Institute

Soner Cagaptay, Ph.D.
Beyer Family Fellow
Director, Turkish Research Program
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Mr. Kadri Gursel
Contributing Writer to Al-Monitor

The Honorable James F. Jeffrey
Philip Solondz Distinguished Visiting Fellow
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy
(Former American Ambassador to Turkey)

Kadir Ustun, Ph.D.
Research Director
Foundation for Political, Economic, and Social Research (SETA)

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.



COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats HEARINGDay Wednesday Date 6/26/13 Room 2172 RHOBStarting Time 2:18 pm Ending Time 4:02 pmRecesses n/a (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Dana Rohrabacher

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒Executive (closed) Session ☐Televised ☒Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

Turkey at a Crossroads: What do the Gezi Park Protests Mean for Democracy in the Region?

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ranking Member William Keating, Rep. Gregory Meeks, Rep. Steve Stockman, Rep. Jeff Duncan, and Rep. Alan Lowenthal.

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

*Rep. Gerry Connolly*HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐


(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

*Prepared Statement of Hillel Fradkin, Ph.D.**Prepared Statement of Soner Cagaptay, Ph.D.**Prepared Statement of Mr. Kadri Gursel**Prepared Statement of The Honorable James F. Jeffrey**Prepared Statement of Kadir Ustun, Ph.D.**Prepared Statement of Rep. Gerry Connolly*

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 4:02 pm
Subcommittee Staff Director

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)
 EE&ET Subcommittee Hearing: Turkey at a Crossroads: What do the Gezi Park Protests Mean for
 Democracy in the Region?
 Wednesday 6/26/13
 2pm

Thank you to Mr. Rohrabacher and Mr. Keating for having me at this hearing. I am not a Member of the Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats subcommittee, but I appreciate your willingness to let me participate.

It has been nearly a month since the clashes in Turkey began. What started as a protest against the construction of replica Ottoman military barracks in Istanbul has morphed into volatile protests against Prime Minister Erdogan. Several protestors and at least one police officer have died. The consequences may be long-term for Turkey—most recently, Germany blocked the next step in Turkey's European Union accession talks over the Turkish Government's reaction to the dissent. Peaceful freedom of assembly is an important right for any democratic country, and expression of dissent is a healthy part of democracy. Turkey's role as an ally is not in question here. That said, a peaceful resolution to this ongoing dispute would go far in showing the world that Turkey truly is a mature democracy worthy of a rising star on the global stage.

The protestors are not a monolith. According to *Al-Monitor*, the protestors have myriad grievances:

The protesters in Turkey are angry. Angry about the peaceful protesters at Gezi Park being attacked by the police with pepper spray, tear gas and water cannons. Angry because of a law passed the preceding week that forbids the purchase of alcohol in shops after 10 pm. Angry about a new bridge in Istanbul being named after an Ottoman sultan responsible for the slaughter of 30,000 Alevis, who comprise roughly 15% of Turkey's population today. They are now also angry about the brutal way in which the police reacted to the Taksim and Gezi protesters. Several people told *Al-Monitor* that plainclothes police officers with iron bars had been seen destroying property. They were recognizable by their blue hats. An older man lamented, "Democratic states don't have tactics like this."¹

As friends of Turkey watch these events unfold, it is important to remember that all democratic countries have protests. We, the United States, have had protests turn violent. That said, when protests result in the loss of life, it is in everyone's interest to come to the table and work out the issues.

Ultimately, the ballot box is a powerful way for the population of a democratic country to voice its views. As friends of Turkey continue to watch the events in Taksim Square unfold, a peaceful resolution that takes into account dissenting views would be a great way for Turkey to show its democratic character. Maintenance of the status quo neither benefits Turkey nor its standing in the world. With that, I welcome our panelists to weigh in on the issue.

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¹ Koert Dubeuf, "Is Taksim the Turkish Tahrir?" *Al Monitor*, 3 June 2013.

